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ABSTRACT

This report examines rural practice in adult literacy programs and estimates the extent and nature of rural illiteracy. Surveys were sent to 3,287 rural literacy programs; more than 700 program directors responded for a return rate of 22 percent. In addition, 150 program directors and key state literacy contacts were interviewed by telephone. Results are presented on the following topics: (1) measures of rural illiteracy; (2) who provides rural literacy programs; (3) current practices; (4) characteristics of rural clients; (5) instructional methods and materials; (6) family literacy programs; (7) the character of the rural environment; (8) how literacy programs network with volunteers and social services agencies; and (9) examples of innovative rural literacy programs. A final chapter presents recommendations directed at local program directors, state departments or coalitions, and the national leadership. This report concludes that: (1) if literacy is defined to be high school completion, rural rates of illiteracy exceed urban ones nearly universally; (2) most literacy programs are underfunded, understaffed, isolated, and ill-equipped to deal with the range of learning problems and needs of their clients; (3) because social problems are defined from an urban context, rural areas find current efforts to expand literacy services of limited value; and (4) the largest single need in rural literacy programs is access to information and training. Appendices include survey and interview protocols, list of rural literacy programs interviewed, rural illiteracy rates by states and age groups, results of the Young Adult Literacy Assessment, and a description of rural literacy providers. (LP)

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# Literacy in Rural America:

## A Study Of Current Needs and Practices

Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development

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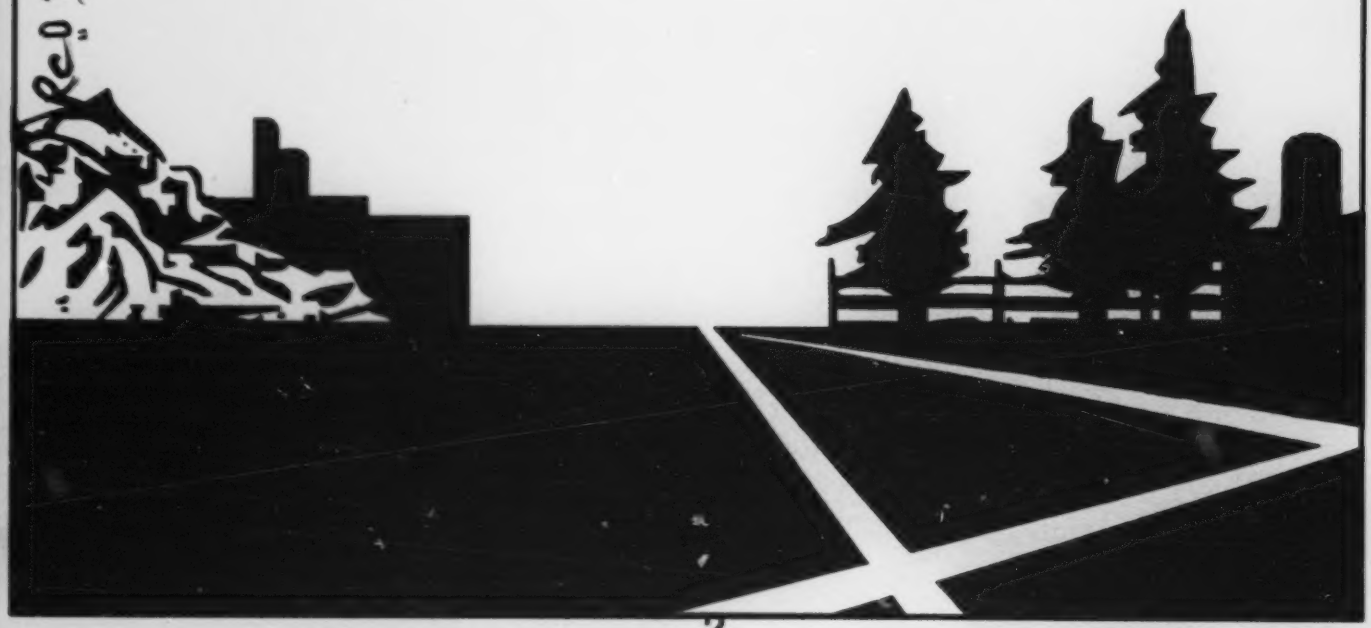



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# Literacy in Rural America:

## A Study Of Current Needs and Practices

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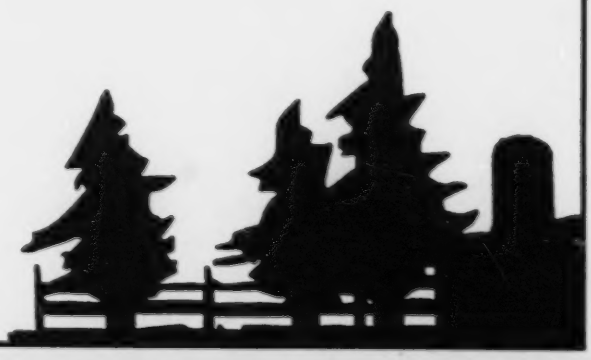
**Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development**
December 1992



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# Foreword

In many respects, work on this publication has been a journey through diversity—we have met adult learners of many cultures and educational providers with different perspectives. The journey offers a glimpse of 63 million rural people, most of whom live in the nation's 14,000 small towns. It takes us to border towns where volunteers educate the influx of non-English speaking people, mobile literacy vans traverse long distances, abandoned store fronts are converted into literacy offices, area community colleges coordinate satellite network sites, and local libraries and schools host diverse community efforts.

So little is heard about rural literacy that many people ask, "Is there really a literacy problem in rural areas?" In fact, rural people make up 28 percent of the United States population but account for 42 percent of the functionally illiterate. This figure is surprising to educators, foundations, and government officials, many of whom have focused their attention on the literacy needs of the inner city. Illiteracy in rural America has been ignored, remaining invisible far too long. This study focuses attention on rural literacy needs and explores the differences, similarities, and possibilities for effective practice.

Motivation for the study came from the Second National Invitational Conference for Rural Adult Postsecondary Education hosted by the Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development in 1986. This conference brought together 200 rural education practitioners seeking to identify the most pressing educational concerns of rural areas. Rural adult illiteracy emerged as a major concern. Funding provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in the spring of 1989 enabled us to begin exploring the issue.

In the early stages of the study, we discovered that what serves to clarify literacy practice in rural areas also serves to confuse it. What one literacy provider describes as ideal, another describes as impossible. What one community identifies as a barrier, another cites as a resource. A great many factors contribute to the diversity we found—a variety of statewide approaches, multiple funding agencies, individual perspectives held by literacy coordinators, and delivery strategies tailored to each community's culture and resources.

State literacy systems function very differently from one another. Some states provide literacy services through public schools while others rely on community colleges. Not only is each state's delivery system unique, but local program directors and state literacy coordinators also have different perspectives on the effectiveness of these systems. What state coordinators describe as effective literacy strategies, local providers often see as programs narrowly focused on adult basic education.

Funding contributes another layer of diversity to rural literacy programs. Funding strategies range from those that rely on grants to others supported by well-financed statewide systems. Some programs are maintained through state and regional foundation support while others rely on local fund raising. Literacy programs are supported by both the private and public sector.

Programs are often initiated and maintained by individuals who became involved in literacy for very different purposes. Some see literacy through the eyes of their clients. Others feel that they are responding to society's need for a better educated work force. These many purposes lead to programs targeted at specific needs—welfare mandates, workplace needs, immigration laws, family concerns, as well as individual empowerment.

Literacy practice in rural areas becomes even more diverse as each program is designed to respond to the unique cultural and social context of its community. What one rural practitioner describes as a good recruitment idea, the next practitioner argues would never work. Client confidentiality can be an enormous barrier in one community and not be seen as a concern in another.

Although states often seek to standardize programs, local coordinators accept and respect the differences created by the local context—the community's social, political, and cultural values. We cannot explain, in detail, why rural communities solve their problems in different ways; nor can we predict how any one program will respond to a given problem. However, these differences are accepted and respected by the individual communities themselves. Each recognizes the need for solutions that grow out of the local culture. Diversity is a feature of rural practice, strengthening the likelihood that individual needs will be met.

The project team for this study was directed by Jacqueline D. Spears, who developed the project design and oversaw the collection of data. Gwen Bailey interviewed key literacy contacts in the 50 states and edited the collective work. Sue Maes identified rural models and provided editorial assistance in drafting the publication.

Initial background research of rural literacy programs was conducted by Ronald Kolenbrander. Peggy Daisey compiled the written survey information and conducted telephone interviews with selected programs. Additional research and

editorial assistance was provided by staff members Larry Combs, Nancy Ohlenbusch, Shay Jewett, and Sharon Rice. Students assisting with the project were Darla Goodman and Sarah Jewett.

In addition to the staff, the Literacy Advisory Committee offered valuable comments, clarification and direction related to the survey materials, model program selections and early drafts of the study's findings. Their collective experience as front-line literacy practitioners helped sharpen our focus and direct the survey work. Members of the Literacy Advisory Committee were: Jack Newell, Director, Gadsen–Wakulla Even Start Project; Sandra Robinson, Director, Adult Education, State of Vermont; Vikki Stewart, Director, Kansas State Library Literacy Program; Miguel Ortega, Interim Dean of Students, Heritage College; Page McCullough, North Carolina Center for Literacy Development (temporary member). Their encouragement, trust, patience, and support was critical to all stages of the project.

Our thanks are extended to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation whose financial support enabled the Rural Clearinghouse to study rural literacy practice. Their leadership in literacy initiatives has played a crucial role in establishing a national dialogue on literacy. In supporting work specific to rural literacy, the MacArthur Foundation has enabled rural practitioners to become part of that dialogue.

Our continued thanks go to Kansas State University which serves as our institutional home.

Finally, the rural literacy program directors and state literacy contacts were generous in the time and information they shared. The surveys and extended telephone interviews they contributed allowed us to probe deeper, listening and learning about these little acclaimed, yet incredibly important literacy endeavors. We hope that this report captures the diversity we found in rural literacy practice and provides an understanding of the work that lies ahead.

# Introduction

The problems with adult illiteracy are not equitably borne by all segments of the American population. Rural residents account for a disproportionate share of the functionally illiterate. Minority populations report illiteracy rates two to three times the national average in both rural and urban areas. For rural areas, these statistics become more alarming in view of the collapse of most natural resource-based economies. Illiteracy poses a formidable barrier to the rural people who now seek employment in more sophisticated labor markets as well as to the rural communities that need to develop new economic bases.

Despite this inequity, little attention and few resources have been directed to rural literacy programs and practices. Little is known about effective rural practice. Urban models and urban issues dominate the research literature, the networks established to disseminate effective practice, and the funding interests of private and public agencies. Given the high rates of illiteracy and the scarcity of information available about rural literacy programs, there is a need for more information which can inform the development of and improve access to rural adult literacy programs.

In 1989 the Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development, with funding provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, began to study rural literacy practice. The purpose of this study was to examine rural practice in adult literacy programs as well as obtain better estimates of the extent and nature of rural illiteracy. We also hoped to identify strategies that allow literacy providers to link with other rural networks. To understand better the diverse and complex issues of rural literacy programs throughout the United States, we developed strategies to gather information from several sources.

The project began by identifying an advisory committee composed of experts in adult literacy and rural education (see Appendix A). The panel met three times over a two-year period and served as consultants for the project. Members reviewed pilot versions of all survey instruments and interview protocols, assisted Clearinghouse staff in interpreting the information gathered, and helped select the programs highlighted in Chapter 100.

The project's first task was to collect a comprehensive list of rural literacy programs. Agencies were asked to provide the names and addresses of rural literacy programs in their respective states. They replied by providing mailing addresses for state literacy directors, statewide literacy coordinators, state librarians, literacy councils, state departments of education, adult educators, literacy coalitions, literacy volunteer organizations, and rural literacy programs. In an attempt to filter out urban literacy programs, the agencies were asked to identify, if possible, which literacy programs were rural and which were not. To further eliminate urban sites from the mailing lists, Rural Clearinghouse staff deleted urban addresses based on the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of metropolitan areas.

In addition to these mailing lists, project staff used national literacy program directories to identify rural programs. The directories used include: the Association for Community Based Education's National Directory of Community Based Adult Literacy Programs, The National Diffusion Network's Adult Literacy Programs That Work, and Business Council for Effective Literacy's State Directory of Key Literacy Contacts.

The names and addresses compiled from these resources and directories resulted in a final list containing 3,287 rural literacy programs. Given that we had expected to identify some 600 programs, we were overwhelmed by the more than 3,000 compiled. Therefore, the management of the information increased five-fold from what we had anticipated.

Once the complete list was compiled, a two-page survey (see Appendix B) was sent to each program. More than 700 program directors responded to the survey, a return rate of 22 percent. Local program directors were asked to provide information on: their program, clients, use of volunteers, and advantages/disadvantages of operating a literacy program in a rural setting. In addition, the survey asked for the number of paid staff and volunteer staff, program affiliation, and region served.

In an effort to examine a cross-section of these rural literacy programs in depth, 150 programs were selected to participate in a telephone interview. The protocol used for these interviews can be found in Appendix C. The 150 sites were selected based on geographic distribution, type of educational provider, unusual delivery methods, unique uses of volunteers, and evidence of family literacy programs. A complete list of programs interviewed has been included in Appendix D.

Finally, telephone interviews with key state literacy contacts in each of the 50 states were conducted in March and April of 1991. State literacy contacts were identified from the Business Council for Effective Literacy's State Directory of Key Literacy Contacts and included directors from state departments of adult education, adult literacy coalitions, public library literacy programs, state literacy councils, and literacy volunteer organizations. The majority of these contacts were persons representing state departments of adult education. The purpose of this process was to verify

information about the definitions and organizational patterns used by states in providing literacy programs. Appendix E includes the protocol used in these interviews.

The information gathered from all these sources has been synthesized in this publication. Individual chapters explore: 1) measures of rural illiteracy, 2) who provides rural literacy programs, 3) current practices, 4) characteristics of rural literacy clients, 5) instructional methods and materials, 6) family literacy programs, 7) the character of the rural environment, 8) how literacy programs network with volunteers and social service agencies, and 9) examples of innovative rural literacy programs. A final chapter presents recommendations directed at local program directors, state departments or coalitions, and the national leadership.

This publication is designed to meet the needs of both local practitioners and state or national policymakers. Those most concerned with policy issues should focus their attention on Chapters 2, 8 and 10—exploring rural illiteracy rates and the manner in which rural environments affect literacy practice. Local literacy providers will find the entire publication valuable. We were not able to integrate all the rich detail and creativity into a single publication, but we hope that what has been shared will encourage rural practitioners to develop networks to continue sharing effective strategies.

# Illiteracy in Rural Areas

Conventional wisdom has it that illiteracy is a more serious problem in rural areas. In the early years of the twentieth century, the Commission on Country Life pointed to the "incubus of ignorance and inertia" that weighed heavily in the lives of rural people. Despite efforts to improve rural schools and the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service, concerns were still voiced in President Johnson's Commission Report, The People Left Behind, more than 50 years later. Those who attended the first National Invitational Meeting on Rural Postsecondary Education in 1981 pointed to discouraging statistics—rural people account for 28 percent of the U.S. population but 42 percent of the functionally illiterate (Margolis, 1981). Yet many rural communities point to their excellent schools and low dropout rates, scoffing that illiteracy is anything more than an artifact of the past.

Any discussion of rural illiteracy is difficult, complicated as much by the diversity found in rural communities as by society's changing definitions of literacy. Comparisons between rural and urban rates are also complex. We can unravel some of this complexity by examining definitions of literacy, current estimates of illiteracy in rural and urban areas, and the changing economic and social environment of rural communities.

## How Do We Define/ Measure Literacy?

Most of us grew up thinking of literacy as simply the ability to read and write. While this definition guided early strategies for measuring literacy, it has been replaced by more sophisticated measures and changing societal needs. The history summarized by Venezky, Kaestle, and Sum (1987) puts some of the current controversy in defining and measuring literacy into context. Their analysis suggests four stages in characterizing adult literacy—self-report, school-based measures, functional definitions, and multi-faceted approaches.

### Self Report

Literacy defined as the ability to read and write reflects early efforts to measure literacy in terms of whether individuals could sign their name to common legal documents, such as deeds or marriage licenses (Campbell, 1986). In 1850 the Census Bureau began asking respondents to report whether they could read and write. Self-report then became the generally accepted measure of adult literacy until World War I when the number of recruits failing the Army entrance exam seemed incomprehensible given the high rates of literacy reported by the Census Bureau (Venezky, Kaestle, and Sum, 1987).

### School-Based Estimates

Beginning around 1930, efforts to define and measure literacy shifted to grade-level equivalents of formal schooling. Researchers assumed that if an individual had completed fourth-grade, for example, he/she could read at the fourth-grade level or better. Consequently, individuals were asked to report what level of schooling they had completed. Although estimates of literacy still depended on a self-report, level of schooling completed offered a more refined estimate than simply whether an individual could read or write. Such a definition also introduced the possibility that what we meant by literacy could change. Early definitions used a third-grade education as the bench mark. By the 1950s, the Census Bureau was using a sixth-grade level (Stedman and Kaestle, 1986).

School-based measures of literacy have limitations, however. Completion of a given grade in school does not guarantee that an individual reads at that level. The way in which reading grade levels are defined means that half the fourth-graders do not read at the fourth-grade reading level, for example. Moreover, the types of reading tasks faced in the fourth-grade are not representative of the reading tasks which adults encounter in everyday life.

### Functional Definitions

A number of researchers began defining literacy in functional terms, developing measures that probed how well adults applied reading and writing skills in everyday situations. Venezky et al. (1987) list five separate assessments launched during the 1970s alone. While these surveys did shift the measure of literacy skills to adult settings, all were somewhat idiosyncratic and could not yield comparable data. In addition, they set arbitrary cut-offs as to what defined literacy. The end result was each assessment differed with regard to its estimate of illiteracy. Even within a given instrument, estimates of adult illiteracy varied with the cut-off selected.

### Multi-Faceted Approach

The Young Adult Literacy Assessment conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 1985 (Campbell, 1986) introduced yet another approach to defining and assessing literacy. The design of the study built on previous efforts to assess literacy in terms of adult contexts but took issue with the notion that literacy could be described in terms of a cut-off score on a single scale. The result was a series of three scales that described an adult's ability to process information and apply logical/ mathematical reasoning in a variety of everyday tasks. A fourth scale composed of items from the NAEP Reading Assessment allowed researchers to compare adult reading

skills with those of high school seniors. This approach to defining and measuring literacy is being adapted for use in the National Adult Literacy Survey planned for 1992.

Over the last 150 years, then, our definition of literacy has changed. Literacy, defined as the need to read and write, has given way to literacy, defined as the need to process information presented in a variety of adult contexts. Although the definition of literacy has changed in response to the development of more refined measurement tools, the definition has also been altered in response to the needs of a changing society. We now acknowledge that any definition of literacy is relative, dependent on the culture and values of the society within which it is measured.

## How Do States Define/ Measure Literacy?

Winterowd (1989) points out that defining literacy is a political act, affecting the allocation of public funds and focus of educational programs. In the United States, the responsibility for education lies with each of the fifty states. Like those concerned with developing valid measures of literacy, states have struggled to define literacy and implement programs that reflect that definition.

In order to gain some sense of how states define literacy, Rural Clearinghouse staff conducted a telephone survey of literacy directors over the period extending from January through April 1991. Depending on the state, either the director of the state literacy initiative or the literacy specialist within the state department of education responded. While the survey was designed to explore a number of issues (see Appendix E), one question asked for the state's current definition of literacy. Interviews were conducted with 48 of the 50 states, only one of those failing to provide us with any information on that state's definition. Table 1 summarizes the results.

**Table 1**
**State Definitions of Literacy**

| Type of Definition | Number of States |
|---|---|
| No Definition | 10 |
| Grade-Level Equivalent | 20 |
| Functional Definition | 17 |

Ten states reported that they either had no definition or were currently working to establish a definition. The reasons they gave for not defining literacy varied, ranging from the desire to let individual programs define it in response to local needs (MA) to the inability to reach consensus on any definition (NE). Three states (AL, MN, and PA) are still working on a definition and another two (IL and OR) simply recommended a definition but left the final choice up to each program.

Of those states which have definitions, more than half (54 percent) used grade level equivalents. States differed in the cut-off selected. One-third each use fourth-grade, fifth-grade, and eighth-grade equivalents. Most referred to the definitions used in the Federal Adult Basic Education (ABE) Act or to the availability of Census data with which to assess needs as the reason for using this type of definition. Two states went beyond the definition of functional literacy (eighth-grade equivalent) used by the Federal ABE Act. Illinois recommended that its programs work toward ninth-grade reading levels. Washington has moved to the 10th-grade equivalent but feels that those with less than a high school diploma are actually at risk. Wisconsin agrees. Minnesota's statewide literacy initiative has also recommended that the state move to the 12th-grade equivalent.

*Literacy, defined as the need to read and write, has given way to literacy, defined as the need to process information presented in a variety of adult contexts.*

The remaining states have adopted a definition that avoids grade level comparisons. For the most part, these definitions emphasize reading, writing, and computing skills needed to function in everyday life. Consequently, they are often referred to as functional definitions. Two states (DE and KS) add references to knowledge as well as skills. Delaware also makes specific references to critical thinking skills, while Kansas adds problem solving skills to its definition.

Functional definitions differ in terms of whether they refer to functions generally assumed to be important to society or functions defined to be important by the learner. Vermont, for example, defines literacy in terms of the knowledge and skills needed to achieve individual and personal goals. By contrast, North Carolina defines literacy as the ability to function in society and the workplace. Such a definition could allow the state or individual programs to decide which skills are important to society or the workplace. Of the seventeen states which use functional definitions, eight referred to goals selected by the learner while nine left the definition in broader, societal terms.

State definitions of literacy reflect a number of realities which must be faced when you move from a theoretical discussion of literacy to the practical issues involved in designing and delivering programs. First, definitions are hard to establish. Literacy has become so politicized that many states find it time-consuming if not impossible to reach consensus on a definition of literacy. Second, the definition adopted by a state may very well affect the willingness of clients to participate in programs. Functional, descriptive definitions are considered more acceptable because they are less demeaning to adults. Finally, the problem of matching definitions with data poses a real dilemma. Although researchers have developed a number of more appropriate literacy measures, few provide the state-specific data required to assess needs or guide program design. Grade-level equivalents continue to be used, in part because the information is available on a county by county basis.

## What Do We Really Know About Rural Illiteracy?

Although a number of the literacy assessments conducted since 1970 have sampled rural populations, they offer little agreement as to whether rural people are more likely to lack basic literacy skills. Moreover, rural communities are extremely diverse, making nationwide estimates of limited value. In order to get some sense of the character and extent of adult illiteracy in rural areas, we need to examine data on at least a state by state basis. Despite the limitations of grade-level equivalents, the U.S. Census continues to offer the most detailed information.

In order to characterize adult illiteracy in rural areas, we must grapple with three definitions—literacy, adult, and rural. Given that states don't agree on a single definition of literacy, it seems appropriate to look at illiteracy rates for several different cut-offs. Three levels—fourth-grade, eighth-grade, and twelfth-grade—offer a range of estimates from the most basic to the most advanced of the definitions currently being used in states.

Although the term adult typically applies to those 16 years or older, this definition proves awkward when a twelfth-grade level of schooling is used as the cut-off for estimates of illiteracy. If high school graduation rates for 16, 17, 18, 19, 20–24, and 25+ year-olds are examined, the rates increase rapidly and then stabilize at the 20–24 years-old interval. Since we want to look at twelfth-grade completion as one cut-off, it seems appropriate to define adult as 20 years and older.

Finally, definitions of rural vary. This chapter used the Census definition for rural—those living in the open countryside or in towns of less than 2500 which lie outside urbanized areas. This is a conservative definition of rural, excluding those who live in larger communities which act as regional centers for rural regions of the country. Based on the Census definition, rural people made up 26.3 percent of our population in 1980 (U.S. Census, 1980).

What follows is a brief look at rural illiteracy and the extent to which rates differ from those found in urban areas. The first section looks at illiteracy rates among rural adults, given the three definitions commonly used. The second section contrasts rural rates with urban rates, asking to what extent there are significant rural–urban differences. The final section explores these same questions for the young adult population, those aged 20–24. Tables and maps are included to create a general picture of rural illiteracy. Those who would like more detail should turn to Appendices F–I, which include the tables summarized in this discussion.

### What are Illiteracy Rates in Rural Areas?

Figures 1–3 summarize adult illiteracy levels in rural areas, using definitions based on fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade equivalencies respectively. Given the most basic definition of literacy, completion of the fourth-grade, illiteracy rates in rural areas range from a low of 0.7 percent in New Hampshire to a high of 8.9 percent in Louisiana (Figure 1). When we shift to an eighth-grade-level equivalency, illiteracy rates increase markedly. The range extends from a low of 7.8 percent in Utah to a high of 36.6 percent in Kentucky (Figure 2). Finally, choosing a definition of twelfth-grade equivalency increases the rates yet again. Adult illiteracy levels in rural areas range from a low of 19.8 percent in Connecticut to a high of 52.6 percent in Kentucky (Figure 3). Averaged over the nation as a whole, adult illiteracy rates in rural areas increase from 3.8 percent at fourth-grade equivalency to 20.8 percent at eighth-grade equivalency to 37.5 percent at twelfth-grade equivalency. Table 2 lists the rural illiteracy rate averaged over the nation as a whole and the range of state averages for each of the three cut-offs selected.

**Table 2**
**Rural Illiteracy Rates Based on Grade Level Equivalents (Adults Aged 20 and Older)**

| | 4th Grade | 8th Grade | 12th Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average | 3.8% | 20.8% | 37.5% |
| Range of State Averages | 0.7% to 8.9% | 7.8% to 36.6% | 19.8% to 52.6% |

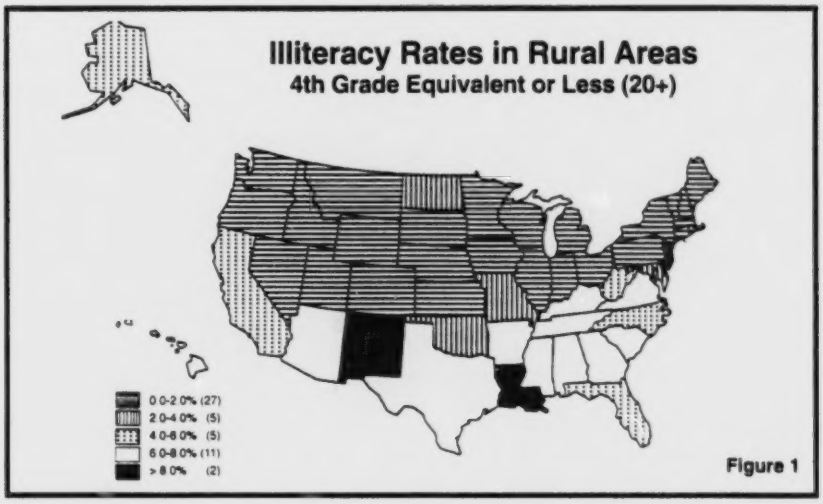



Figure 1

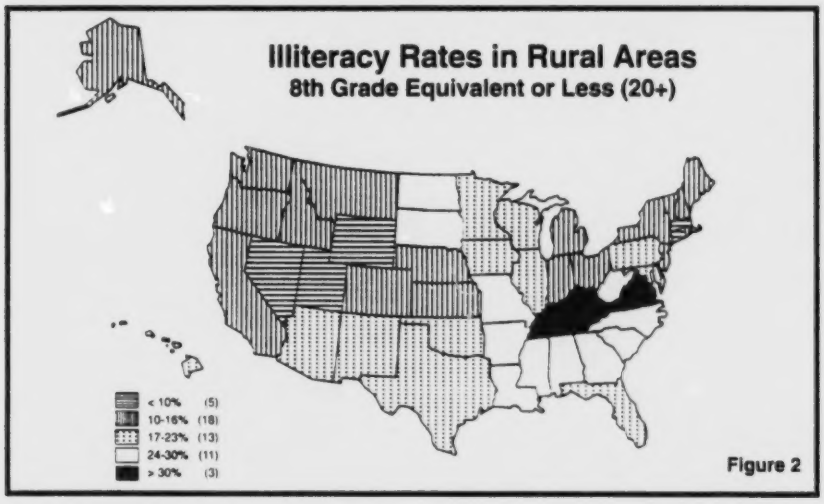



Figure 2

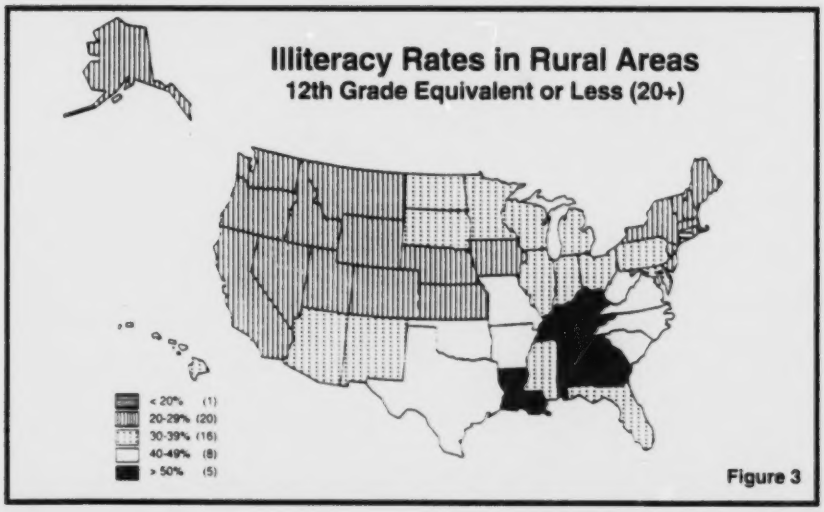



Figure 3

Regardless of which definition of illiteracy is selected, regional patterns exist. Illiteracy rates are highest across the southern part of the country. This area extends northward to include Kentucky and West Virginia in the East, and, to a lesser extent, California in the West. Rates are lowest in New England and across much of the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountain States, and the Pacific Northwest. The patterns seem independent of the extent to which a state's population lives in rural areas. Vermont, with more than 65 percent of its population classified as rural, has illiteracy rates lower than Oregon, with 37 percent of its population considered rural. Much of the Southeast is extremely rural; states such as Idaho, Maine, or Iowa have significantly lower rates of adult illiteracy despite equally sizable portions of rural populations. Thus, rurality by itself does not seem to explain the different rates of rural adult illiteracy found across the 50 states.

## How do Rural Rates Compare with Urban Ones?

Although a number of literacy assessments have sampled rural populations, there seems to be little agreement as to whether rural people are more likely to lack basic literacy skills. Twenty-seven percent of those classified as Level 1 (Least Competent) by the Adult Performance Level Study (Venezky, 1977) came from rural areas—a rate about equivalent to their presence in the general population. Level 2 (Marginally Competent), however, included a disproportionately large number of rural residents. The English Language Proficiency Study showed that only eight percent of those classified as illiterate resided in rural areas (U.S. Department of Education, 1986). NAEP assessment of reading scores among school-aged youth have consistently shown rural clients scoring higher than inner city clients but lower than suburban clients.

*With the exception of a few states in the Northeast, rural rates of illiteracy typically exceed urban ones.*

Given the mixed results provided by the various literacy assessments, it seems useful to turn to the more detailed comparisons possible with data from the U.S. Census. Illiteracy rates for rural and urban populations in each state can be compared by looking at the differences between the two rates. Table 3 lists the rural and urban illiteracy rates averaged over the nation as a whole as well as the range of individual state averages.

Figures 4–6 summarize those differences for the fourth-grade, eighth-grade, and twelfth-grade equivalent definitions of illiteracy. The three figures do enable us to make some general observations about rural and urban rates of illiteracy. First, rural and urban differences do exist regardless of which definition of illiteracy is selected. With the exception of a few states in the Northeast, rural rates of illiteracy typically exceed urban ones. Second, the size of rural–urban differences increases as we pick higher grade-level equivalent definitions for illiteracy. Most states have rural and urban illiteracy rates within two percent of one another at the equivalent of a fourth-grade education. When a twelfth-grade equivalent is used, only five states have urban and rural illiteracy rates that fall within two percent of one another. The gap between urban and rural illiteracy rates increases as more demanding definitions of literacy are chosen.

A number of states in the Northeast actually have urban illiteracy rates that exceed rural ones. Rhode Island and Connecticut are most striking, as urban rates of illiteracy are larger than rural ones by two percent at the fourth-grade equivalent, seven percent at the eighth-grade level, and ten

**Table 3**

**Illiteracy Rates Based on Grade Level Equivalents (Adults Aged 20 and Older)**

| | 4th Grade | | 8th Grade | | 12th Grade | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| Average | 3.8% | 3.0% | 20.8% | 14.7% | 37.5% | 29.2% |
| Range of State Averages | 0.7% to 8.9% | 1.1% to 5.7% | 7.8% to 36.6% | 4.5% to 19.9% | 19.8% to 52.6% | 12.8% to 37.2% |

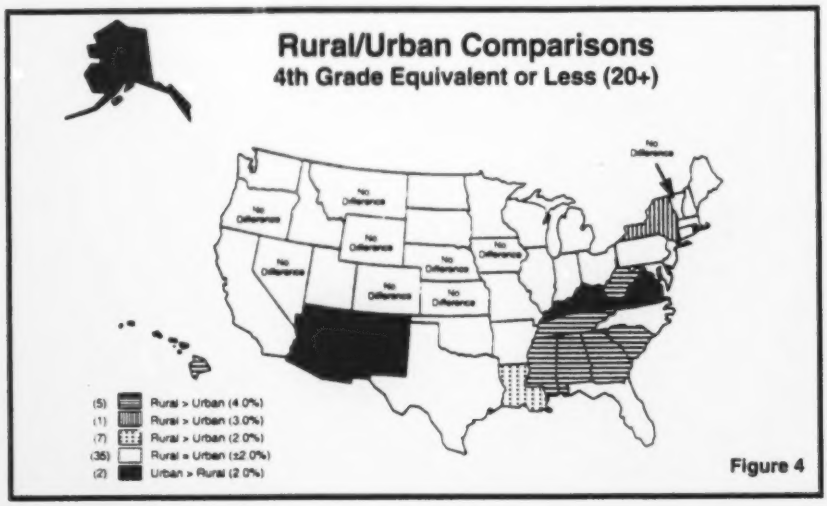

Rural/Urban Comparisons
4th Grade Equivalent or Less (20+)
No Difference
(5) Rural > Urban (4.0%)
(1) Rural > Urban (3.0%)
(7) Rural > Urban (2.0%)
(35) Rural = Urban (±2.0%)
(2) Urban > Rural (2.0%)

Figure 4

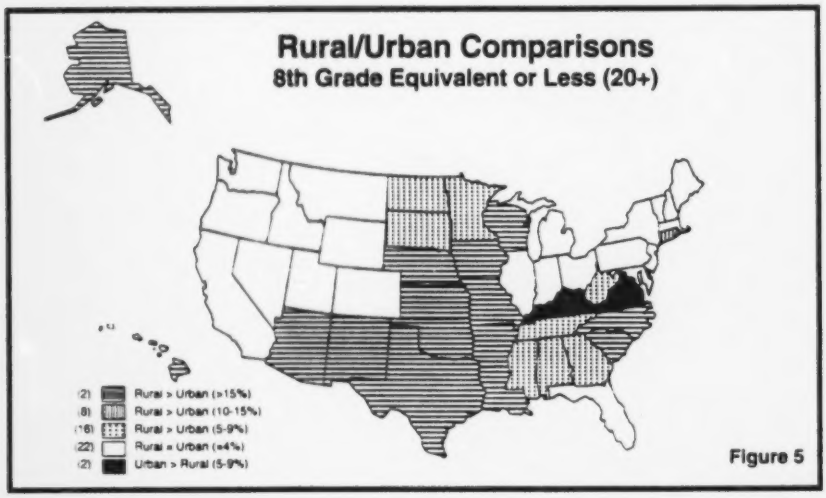

Rural/Urban Comparisons
8th Grade Equivalent or Less (20+)
(2) Rural > Urban (>15%)
(8) Rural > Urban (10-15%)
(16) Rural > Urban (5-9%)
(22) Rural = Urban (±4%)
(2) Urban > Rural (5-9%)

Figure 5

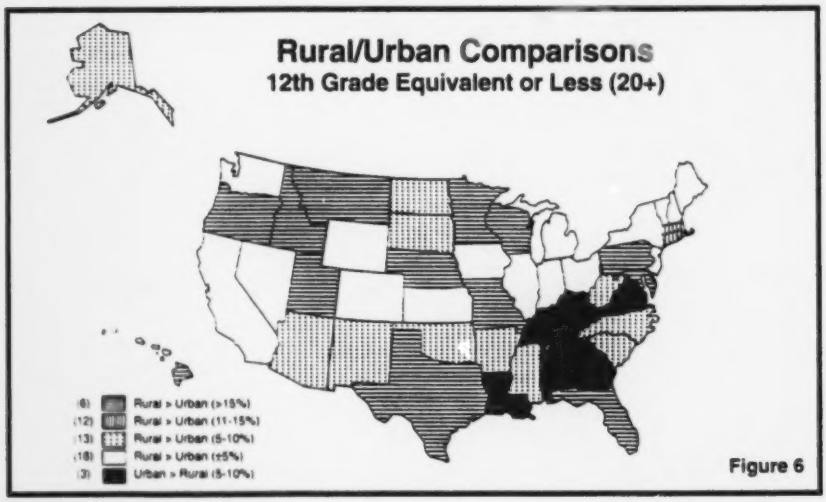

Rural/Urban Comparisons
12th Grade Equivalent or Less (20+)
(6) Rural > Urban (>15%)
(12) Rural > Urban (11-15%)
(13) Rural > Urban (5-10%)
(18) Rural > Urban (±5%)
(3) Urban > Rural (5-10%)

Figure 6

percent at the twelfth-grade equivalent. Massachusetts and New Jersey each show more modest increases in the gap between urban and rural illiteracy rates. New York and New Hampshire show urban rates consistently higher than rural rates, regardless of which definition is selected.

Most states have rural rates of illiteracy that exceed urban ones. About one-third of the states show modest differences, such that rural rates of illiteracy exceed urban ones by two percent or less at the fourth-grade level and by five percent or less at the twelfth-grade level. In four states (MN, MO, ND and SD) a minor gap between rural and urban illiteracy rates at the fourth-grade level becomes a major gap at the eighth-grade level that persists at the twelfth-grade level. Kentucky shows a similar trend but begins with the largest rural–urban gap at the fourth-grade equivalent. The remaining states show an increasing gap between rural and urban rates of illiteracy as the definition shifts from fourth- to eighth- and finally to twelfth-grade equivalencies, as shown in Figures 4–6.

## Will These Differences Persist?

Historically, educational levels have been lower in rural areas. Until the middle part of this century, poorer quality schools coupled with relatively lucrative job opportunities in natural-resource based activities meant that rural youth often left school at an earlier age than did urban youth. Throughout much of the Great Plains, however, rural schools now report some of the lowest dropout rates nationwide. It seems relevant to ask to what extent current patterns will continue. Two sources of data, the young adult segment of the 1980 Census and the Young Adult Literacy Assessment, allow us to explore this question.

Illiteracy rates reported in earlier sections of this report included all adults aged 20 and older. The youngest group, those aged 20–24 when the 1980 Census was taken, are now in their early to mid thirties. If we assume that schools have remained as effective as they were for these individuals, comparisons of this age-range allow us to project how the character of literacy problems might change in the future. Figures 7–9 show rural illiteracy rates by state for this age group.

Table 4 presents rural illiteracy rates for young adults, given each of the three grade-level equivalents commonly used to define illiteracy. Rural rates of illiteracy are less than one percent at the fourth-grade level and increase to more than 20 percent at the twelfth-grade level. For the young adult, the most sizable increase in illiteracy occurs when the definition shifts from an eighth-grade equivalent to a twelfth-grade equivalent. This contrasts with the adult sample as a whole where the two increases (fourth-grade to eight-grade equivalent and eighth-grade to twelfth-grade equivalent) are about the same.

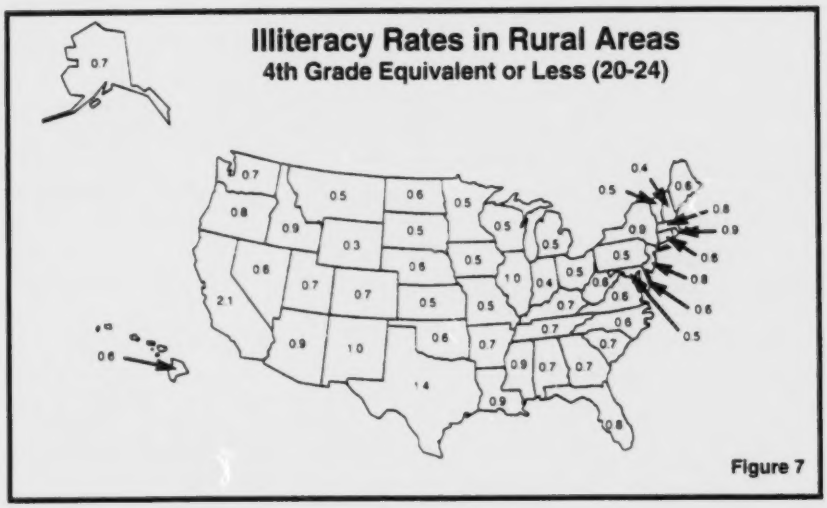
**Table 4**
**Rural Illiteracy Rates Based on Grade Level Equivalents (Young Adult Cohort—Ages 20–24)**

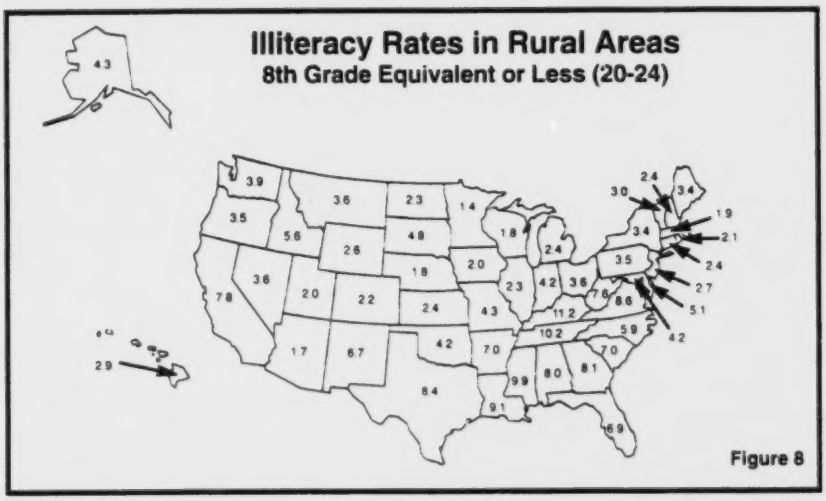
| | 4th Grade | 8th Grade | 12th Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average | 0.9% | 5.3% | 21.7% |
| Range of State Averages | 0.3% to 2.1% | 1.4% to 11.2% | 9.5% to 33.2% |

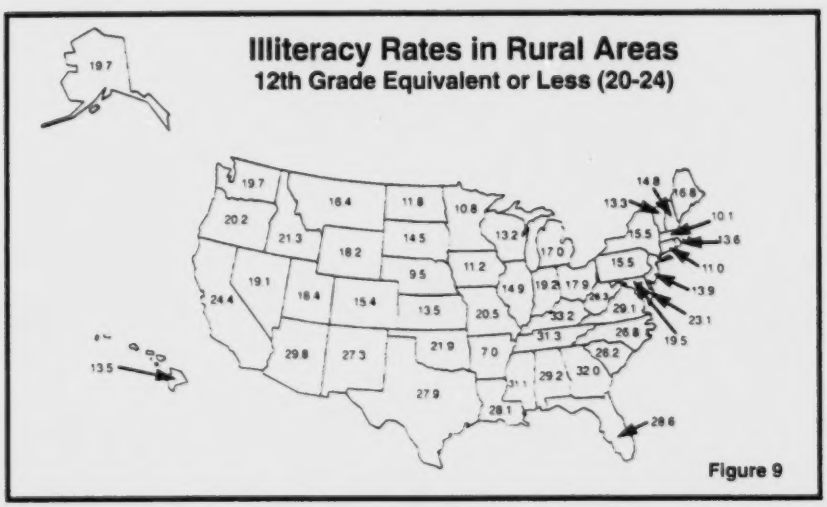
**Table 5**

**Illiteracy Rates Based on Grade Level Equivalents (Young Adult Cohort—Ages 20–24)**

| | 4th Grade | | 8th Grade | | 12th Grade | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| Average | 0.9% | 0.9% | 5.3% | 3.9% | 21.7% | 16.6% |
| Range of State Averages | 0.3% to 2.1% | 0.0% to 2.9% | 1.4% to 11.2% | 1.0% to 6.7% | 9.5% to 33.2% | 7.2% to 21.5% |
| States with No Rural–Urban Differences | 30 | | 11 | | 7 | |


Illiteracy Rates in Rural Areas
4th Grade Equivalent or Less (20-24)
0.7
0.6
Figure 7


Illiteracy Rates in Rural Areas
8th Grade Equivalent or Less (20-24)
4.3
2.9
Figure 8


Illiteracy Rates in Rural Areas
12th Grade Equivalent or Less (20-24)
19.7
13.5
Figure 9

Urban and rural differences are virtually non-existent at the fourth-grade level, fairly modest at the eighth-grade level, and noticeable at the twelfth-grade level as shown in Table 5.

No state had urban and rural rates that differed by more than one percent at the fourth-grade level. Four states (KY, MS, TN, and VA) had rural rates that exceeded urban ones by more than 5 percent at the eighth-grade level. Ten states have rural–urban gaps in excess of 10 percent at the twelfth-grade equivalent. At this same level, five states (CT, IL, MA, NY and RI) report urban rates that are higher than rural ones, although the differences are less than five percent.

The Young Adult Literacy Assessment conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 1985 offers another description of the literacy skills of young adults. This study measured the literacy skills of a sample of 3,618 young adults between the ages of 21 and 25. This sample was selected to allow generalization to the nation's population of young adults aged 21 to 25, with African Americans and Hispanics oversampled in order to provide more stable estimates for each. Young adults living in rural areas were sampled in proportion to the fraction of those living in rural areas but were not oversampled as were African American and Hispanic populations.

*Ten states have rural–urban gaps in excess of 10 percent at the twelfth-grade equivalent.*

The fact that the NAEP study did not oversample rural populations means that the data will not support rural–urban comparisons. The rural sample was too small to yield data that could be generalized to the rural population as a whole. Said differently, another set of rural participants might have led to different estimates for the rural population as a whole. There is so little information available on rural illiteracy, however, that the data is worth examining despite its limitations.

The assessment instrument consisted of four scales, one of which was constructed from items used in the NAEP Reading Assessment. This scale allowed researchers to link young adult performance to data routinely gathered from 17 year olds who are still in school. The other three scales explored young adult proficiency in reading, interpreting, and using information encountered in relatively common adult reading tasks. The three scales were called Prose Literacy, Document Literacy, and Quantitative Literacy.

As shown in Table 6, differences between urban and rural samples were too small to be considered significant. The absolute difference between mean scores was largest for the NAEP Reading scale (1.8 scale points) and considerably smaller for the three literacy scales. Given the limited size of the rural sample, none of these differences are significant.

**Table 6**

**Young Adult Literacy Assessment**
**Rural–Urban Comparisons**

| Scale | Rural | Urban | Difference* |
|---|---|---|---|
| NAEP Reading Scale | 294.6 | 292.8 | 1.8 |
| Prose Literacy | 294.8 | 293.9 | 0.9 |
| Document Literacy | 292.8 | 293.2 | –0.4 |
| Quantitative Literacy | 294.3 | 293.5 | 0.8 |

* These differences are not significant, given the standard error of the measurements and the fact that the rural population was not oversampled to provide more stable estimates.

Each of the four scales was designed to offer a range of reading and literacy tasks. The scales themselves extend from 0 to 500 with the mean of the sample set at 305. Moving along each scale from 0 to 500, we can compare the percentage of urban and rural populations at or above that level of proficiency. In general, the two populations differed very little. One interesting pattern was the consistency with which the urban population included a higher percentage of people at higher proficiency levels.

At a proficiency level of 250 or higher, the urban population consistently reported higher percentages at or above the various levels (see Appendix J). This result could arise from the limited sample taken for the rural population and may not mean anything. The pattern was so consistent, however, that it would be worth exploring in future studies. Compared to the substantial differences reported for minority populations (Kirsch and Jungeblut, 1986), scale differences due to a rural location appear to be either nonexistent or minor.

## What Does All This Mean?

We began this section of the report by asking to what extent conventional wisdom is true. Is illiteracy a more serious problem in rural areas? Data from the U.S. Census and the more recent Young Adult Literacy Assessment suggest that the answer to our question is a qualified yes.

If we simply look at rural–urban comparisons for the nation as a whole, how severe the problem is depends on which

definition of literacy is used. Differences between urban and rural illiteracy rates are relatively small at the fourth-grade level, increase at the eighth-grade level, and become substantial at the twelfth-grade level. While the gap is certainly much less when we look at just young adults (those aged 20–24 in 1980), it remains substantial when more demanding definitions of literacy are used. If we believe that businesses will require increasingly higher levels of literacy skills, our analysis suggests that the gap between rural and urban competencies will remain a barrier to rural development.

*It does seem clear that as rural economies change and increased literacy skills become a necessity, rural illiteracy rates will remain a barrier to statewide and local development efforts.*

If we look at individual states rather than national averages, it seems clear that states have had mixed success in eliminating rural–urban differences. Most states show rural rates of illiteracy that are greater than urban ones, but a few states in the Northeast are actually experiencing urban rates that exceed rural ones. Most states show few differences at the fourth-grade level, larger differences at the eighth-grade level, and sizable differences at the twelfth-grade level. The gap is less when we look at the young adult age group but still substantial at the twelfth-grade level. The most serious and persistent gaps occur across the South, Southwest, and Appalachia.

Rural illiteracy rates remain a serious problem. The character of the problem is not uniform across the fifty states, however. Nor is the problem among younger rural adults as serious as it was for those a generation ago. It does seem clear that as rural economies change and increased literacy skills become a necessity, rural illiteracy rates will remain a barrier to statewide and local development efforts.

# Who are the Providers?

One feature of literacy practice is that there are many agencies involved in providing services. Historically, literacy programs were offered either through adult education programs affiliated with the public schools or through volunteer organizations, such as Literacy Volunteers of America. Growing concerns with illiteracy coupled with the transition to the Information Age brought a number of new providers into the field. Literacy programs now reflect a range of purposes and are often supported by an equally wide range of organizations. Those living in urban areas may have several programs available from which to choose. We thought it would be valuable to see if this same diversity exists in rural areas.

Having compiled a list of more than 3,000 literacy programs located in rural areas, we tried to categorize each in terms of the supporting agency (see Appendix K). When state directories identified programs in terms of the type of educational provider, those assignments were used. If no such assignment had been made, then the name or location (at a school or in a library) identified its category. If a literacy program was affiliated with more than one provider, what appeared to be the dominant category was assigned. When a dominant category could not be identified, we simply assigned the program to "Other." As shown in Table 7, 18 different categories of rural literacy providers were identified. These categories range from 38 to less than 0.2 in terms of the percent of rural literacy programs they include.

**Table 7**
**Providers for Rural Literacy Programs**

| Category of Provider | Number of Programs | % of total* |
|---|---|---|
| School/Adult Learning Center | 1249 | 39.0 |
| Libraries | 455 | 14.2 |
| Coalition/Council | 382 | 11.9 |
| Community Based Organizations | 259 | 8.1 |
| Community College | 232 | 7.2 |
| Vocational–Technical School | 201 | 6.3 |
| Volunteers | 138 | 4.3 |
| Job Training | 102 | 3.2 |
| Community Education | 44 | 1.4 |
| Other | 43 | 1.3 |
| State College/University | 31 | 1.0 |
| Religious Organization | 20 | .6 |
| Appalachian Regional Commission | 15 | .5 |
| Community Development | 10 | .3 |
| Business/Industry/Workplace | 10 | .3 |
| Aging Agency | 8 | < .2 |
| Health Agency | 3 | < .2 |
| Prison | 2 | < .2 |
| Parks/Recreation | 1 | < .2 |

* Total n = 3205

Although rural literacy programs are provided through a number of different agencies, the majority of programs are offered through just three providers—schools/adult learning centers, libraries, and coalitions/councils. Other categories such as community-based organizations or job-training agencies, account for less than ten percent each of the rural literacy programs identified. The more detailed information collected from the 700+ surveys returned, the 150 literacy programs interviewed by telephone, and the 50 state literacy contacts enable us to examine these categories more closely.

## School Districts

Nearly one-half of the states use local school districts as the primary provider through which they offer literacy programs. Our lists reflect this strategy. Of the 3,205 rural literacy providers initially identified, 1,249 (39%) are local school districts. The states identify these school-based agencies by various names—adult learning centers, local education agencies, leading education agencies, and comprehensive adult learning centers. They are, in fact, strongly aligned with school districts.

Historically, these programs evolved from federal funds made available through the Adult Basic Education (ABE)

*Nearly one-half of the states use local school districts as the primary provider through which they offer literacy programs.*

Act first passed in 1964. School districts rely upon federal funds and state matching monies made available to literacy programs through this legislation. In addition to providing funds to operate programs, some states allocate money to accomplish a specific task. For example, Utah provides each school district with a specific amount of money to purchase computer software and hardware in an effort to help local school districts and literacy programs move into the Information Age.

One of the problems posed in using school districts to administer rural literacy programs is that neither the funds nor staffing are focused entirely on literacy. ABE funds support not only literacy efforts but also a wide range of other services for adult learners, such as increased reading comprehension, tests of General Educational Development (GED), and English as a Second Language (ESL). In addition, school district-based literacy programs are often coordinated by continuing education directors, Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) directors, community college personnel, librarians, or secondary school personnel. Most coordinators are part-time employees who are also assigned instructional duties.

Because of the many roles played by these personnel, funds and staffing linked with literacy efforts over-represent the resources actually available to meet basic literacy needs in rural areas.

## Libraries

Ranked second by the 50 state literacy contacts, libraries also emerge as one of the more common providers of literacy services in rural areas. Although many states rely on local school districts, community colleges/vocational–technical schools, or councils/coalitions as their primary provider of literacy services, nearly all states mentioned libraries as a key component in their state literacy efforts. California and Indiana commit the largest amount of state funds to library-based programs.

*Libraries in small towns are frequently used as tutoring sites for literacy programs offered by other educational providers.*

At one time, libraries had federal start-up monies for literacy programs. These monies allowed libraries the option of several different approaches to literacy. They could: 1) purchase high-interest, low-reading level materials, 2) conduct literacy classes at their library, 3) provide tutor training, 4) provide librarian training to organize literacy programs, 5) hire a salaried literacy coordinator, or 6) conduct literacy workshops. In addition to conducting their own in-house programs, libraries in small towns are frequently used as tutoring sites for literacy programs offered by other educational providers.

## Community Colleges/ Vocational–Technical Schools

Community colleges/vocational–technical schools were also identified as major providers of rural literacy programs. Arizona, California, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming all use community colleges as the major vehicle for providing access to literacy programs. In most cases, community colleges and vocational–technical schools link literacy programs with GED programs and other adult education offerings.

Two administrative strategies are used to allow these agencies to extend literacy programs to more remote sites. One approach is to allow the community colleges to establish branch sites. A second strategy allows community colleges or vocational–technical schools to contract with other organizations, such as community-based organizations, libraries, hospitals, and school districts to offer literacy programs in the smaller communities. Community colleges act as the administrative center while these organizations provide the literacy training.

## Community-Based Organizations, Volunteer Programs, and Literacy Coalitions/Councils

Playing an increasingly important role in providing rural literacy programs are community-based organizations, volunteer programs, and literacy coalitions/councils. These literacy providers are not generally affiliated with schools, libraries, or community colleges/vocational–technical schools. Instead, they are locally controlled and depend heavily on volunteers to provide literacy services. Because of their familiarity with the community, these programs permit a rapid response to community needs. Unfortunately, community-based or volunteer programs also share another trait—the lack of political influence with which to secure funding. Some programs receive United Way funding or contributions from local businesses, but the majority must engage in various fund-raising or grant-writing activities in order to remain vital.

Many literacy providers in this category identify their programs as volunteer programs or literacy coalitions/ councils. Volunteer tutoring programs are well known across the United States and are often affiliated with or use Laubach or Literacy Volunteers of America methodologies and materials. These providers train tutors, recruit learners, identify resources, and initiate new programs. State coalitions, state commissions, state councils, and state alliances were also common terms that identified statewide volunteer organizations. These statewide groups develop promotional campaigns, solicit foundation support, direct inquiries for new program development, serve as watchdog and advocate for pertinent state legislation, and provide technical assistance to local volunteer programs. A few states have funded literacy–volunteer offices to assist with new program development. Other states have designated a person within their state department of education as the state literacy resource-person.

The Association for Community-Based Education, a national organization, defines community-based organizations as ones "that arise from the needs of a very specific community of people, are controlled and operated by that community, use methods and materials that address the unique interests and learning styles of the participants, and focus on the development of both the individual participants and their community." Not all programs that call themselves

community-based work in this broader, empowering way. Many programs do address a broad base of community issues while others use the community-based term to designate that they originated at the community level.

A number of trends suggest that community-based literacy efforts may become more common in rural areas. Six states (MD, MS, NM, OH, RI and VA) report state legislation that funds community literacy efforts. These funds allow rural communities themselves to become a more viable player in organizing rural literacy programs. With the passage of the National Adult Literacy Act of 1991, new opportunities for funding, training and technical support should also be available for community programs. Prior to this act, many states restricted access to federal adult education funds to recognized educational agencies, such as public schools or community colleges. This new act requires that state education agencies provide community-based programs direct and equitable access to federal adult education funds.

*A number of trends suggest that community-based literacy efforts may become more common in rural areas.*

## What Does All This Mean?

Rural literacy programs are provided by a variety of institutions, volunteers, agencies, coalitions, and councils. Very few states are dominated by one single provider. But the diversity is not as large as expected. To a large extent, rural literacy programs appear to be dominated by the availability of federal ABE funds. States have allocated those funds such that rural needs are addressed, but reliance on those funds has meant that most rural communities are served through more traditional educational agencies—schools or community colleges. Workplace, job-training, or even community education efforts are relatively limited. It would appear that the increased diversity in literacy services encouraged by the high visibility of literacy concerns has had a limited impact on rural communities.

# State Directors Report on Literacy Practice

In an effort to explore the stability of literacy programs, state directors in all 50 states were asked if literacy programs had increased or decreased in the last two years (1988–90). If an increase was reported, then the follow-up question was asked, "Is this increase resulting in any new rural literacy programs?" Of the fifty states, 2 reported that they had lost programs while 5 state literacy directors reported that programs in their state had remained constant, neither increasing nor decreasing. The remaining 43 state directors reported that their states were seeing an increase in either the number of programs or number of clients served. This section explores the reasons given for the changes experienced as well as the manner in which these changes are affecting rural programs.

## Why States Have Lost Literacy Programs

Two state directors reported a decrease in the number of literacy programs over the two year period 1988–90. They attributed the loss of literacy programs to a lack of funding and a decline in client participation.

Although federal dollars available to support literacy programs has remained constant or has increased slightly since 1987, these state directors reported that state dollars decreased dramatically due to smaller state appropriations. This trend may continue as more and more states find themselves facing increased competition for limited education dollars. Inequities in public school financing have forced a number of states to increase substantially state support of public schools. The pressures to increase support for higher education are also growing.

The second reason given was the difficulty in attracting clients. Several state literacy contacts felt that it was difficult to get clients to take advantage of literacy programs, especially in rural areas. Tutors were often trained only to have few clients show up. In some cases, the enthusiasm to set up programs and train tutors simply outstripped client demand for literacy services. State directors did not seem to feel that this reflected a lack of need for literacy training. They felt that they had simply underestimated the need to build credibility for the program within the local community before training a large cadre of volunteer tutors.

## Why States Have Gained Literacy Programs

State directors in four states reported that they were not gaining programs, but they were seeing an increase in the number of clients served. However, 39 states reported an increase in the number of literacy programs. Reasons cited most often were: 1) increased demand/growing public awareness, 2) improved organization of state efforts, and 3) new state funding for literacy efforts.

### Increased Demand/Growing Public Awareness

In many respects, growing awareness and increased demand are linked. As literacy awareness grows, so does the demand placed on these programs by state and local agencies as well as by clients themselves.

The Welfare Reform Act illustrates how state and federal governments have increased the demand placed on literacy programs. The Welfare Reform Act requires welfare recipients who do not have a high school diploma or GED certificate to enroll in a literacy program in order to receive welfare benefits. State literacy contacts indicate that although there is money in the Welfare Reform Act for basic skills programs, some agencies feel that since literacy programs are "free," these funds should go for other purposes. The client load in literacy programs has increased, but states have not necessarily been able to find additional funds to support literacy efforts.

The increase in print and nonprint literacy advertisements, i.e. television, phone, pamphlets, and newspapers, has improved public awareness of literacy programs. One example was a campaign slogan, "Literacy is a Family Affair," which was instrumental in bringing public attention to illiteracy. This advertising campaign coincided, in many instances, with Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS) which encouraged many states to form committees to review the literacy needs in their state.

### Improved Organization of State Literacy Efforts

Increased public awareness forced many states to form statewide coalitions, literacy foundations, and literacy initiatives. These new planning efforts enabled states to reexamine how they deliver literacy services in a more systematic fashion. In some states, the result has been increased state funding.

Some states reported that state funds have been reallocated. In the past, state literacy officials used state monies to

*Literacy contacts emphasized that helping existing providers expand their capacity to serve a more diverse group of people was more beneficial than the proliferation of new, independent programs.*

finance workshops and support the purchase of equipment. After examining the stability of literacy programs in a systematic manner, states began allocating funds for daily operating expenses as well as salaries supporting coordinators and tutors. This effort to stabilize literacy programs has had a profound effect on increasing public trust of literacy efforts and consequently, on increasing participation.

Another example of improved state organization is the emphasis now placed on collaboration. In examining their state literacy efforts, some directors were hesitant about measuring success simply in terms of an increase in the number of literacy programs. They suggested that it was more important to encourage communities to seek service from existing programs. Literacy contacts emphasized that helping existing providers expand their capacity to serve a more diverse group of people was more beneficial than the proliferation of new, independent programs.

### New Funding for Literacy Efforts

The cumulative effect of the demand for more literacy programs, increased awareness of literacy efforts, and statewide collaborative efforts has been an increase in literacy funding in some states. Within the last two years, six states (MD, MS, NM, OH, RI and VA) now provide annual appropriations for community-based and new-reader literacy programs. This increased state support provides seed monies that enable local programs to generate new monies by forming foundations, developing scholarship funds, soliciting local businesses, and pursuing local funding. When literacy programs are perceived as successful, they find it easier to recruit tutors, clients, and additional funding.

## New Rural Literacy Efforts

When the state literacy directors reported an increase in literacy programs, they were asked if any of the new literacy programs were rural-based. The remaining state director responses fell into two types—those that reflected little or no distinction between rural and urban programs and those that had specifically addressed rural issues or were beginning to do so.

### No Rural/Urban Distinction

Eight states identified themselves as a predominately rural state and argued that any literacy program was a rural effort. "We're already covering all of the state with our ABE program," and "Our literacy efforts emphasize getting programs out into the rural areas," were comments that characterized the feeling of the state literacy contacts. These states make few distinctions between rural and urban programs. Any literacy effort, because of the nature of their state, is addressing rural literacy needs.

Sixteen state literacy contacts focused on programs that were newly funded, regardless of whether the program was rural-based or not. The new programs mentioned include: Homeless Educational Project, Family Literacy, Workplace Literacy, VISTA Literacy Volunteers, Job Training Partnership Act, Welfare Reform Act, and Community Action Plans. Without exception, these programs touch the lives of many rural adults. However, none were formulated with the specific purpose of eliminating illiteracy in rural areas.

### Increased Rural Service

Eleven state directors identified new literacy efforts that were rural-based. These programs, funded by newly appropriated or reallocated state monies, include: 1) new programs or 2) expanded programs.

**New Programs.** Literacy program directors reported a variety of strategies for implementing new rural literacy programs, some of which included the use of telephones, mobile vans, home study programs, access to technology, job skills programs, and locally relevant materials.

Three states (AR, MO and OK) have introduced new rural literacy programs that use the telephone to provide a first contact with rural clients. In Arkansas, the "Dial O Program" allows specially-trained telephone operators to take the name and telephone number of anyone who calls asking for literacy help. The information obtained from the individual is sent to the state literacy council, which in turn notifies the literacy program closest to the caller. The literacy program then contacts the individual seeking help. Turn-around time usually takes 24–48 hours. Southwestern Bell and other participating independent telephone companies report that they average six inquires a day.

In Missouri, a literacy hot line has been established to link every high school dropout to a local ABE/GED program. The names of dropouts are reported to a central location which then makes telephone contact with the client. Telephone contacts seem to offer a nonthreatening way for literacy clients to identify themselves and make initial contact with literacy programs.

The state literacy directors in Kentucky, Indiana, and Louisiana reported the use of mobile vans in their new literacy programs. In Indiana, vans go to rural towns to provide literacy training for local residents twice a week.

*In Arkansas, the "Dial O Program" allows spcially-trained telephone operators to take the name and telephone number of anyone who calls asking for literacy help.*

Local stores provide the electricity and parking location. One concern expressed about this delivery system is that literacy programs need to be in contact with clients over a six-month period but the mobile vans tend to move from circuit to circuit once every three months.

Developed in New York, another new literacy program is a GED home-study program. Giving Rural Adults a Study Program (GRASP) is designed to allow individuals who cannot attend on-site classes the opportunity to prepare for their high school equivalency diploma at home. This program requires an eighth-grade reading level and is geared toward the isolated client or the client who prefers home-study. An Oklahoma program has developed videotapes and books for home use.

Missouri has introduced rural literacy programs in economically depressed areas of the state. These programs provide training and job search skills in addition to literacy training. Transportation and childcare assistance are also available. Classes typically meet for only 2–4 hours a week, thereby limiting classroom time. Missouri is also initiating a pilot project to place a full-time paid staff member in several small towns in an attempt to increase participation in rural literacy programs.

There are also new literacy programs that have developed their own curriculum materials. These materials address

*Missouri has introduced rural literacy programs in economically depressed areas of the state.*

local interests and history, offering a link between reading materials and what is familiar to the client. Pennsylvania and New Mexico report rural literacy programs that are developing local high interest/low reading-level materials.

**Expanded Programs.** Some states have made efforts to expand existing rural literacy programs to better fit their local needs. Rhode Island offers one example. For a number of years, rural literacy programs used a non-interactive television literacy series. In order to provide interaction, live instruction was added. Teachers open the program and are able to receive telephone calls while the taped program is running. Once the tape is finished, the teacher comes back on the air to answer questions for the entire listening audience. This adaptation increases the number of rural clients who can participate interactively.

Another common strategy for expanding rural literacy programs is to increase the number of literacy sites. Community colleges in Washington are in the process of expanding to 44 campus and 225 outreach locations. Another state plans to increase the number of downlink locations capable of receiving literacy programs through satellite feed.

To increase the number of rural literacy sites, a library-based, Idaho literacy group conducted six staff development workshops on how to organize and fund a rural literacy program. Scattered around the state, each workshop was offered to teams which included an ABE director, a VISTA volunteer, and a librarian selected from a local community. Based on the needs of the local community, this team designed a literacy program identifying personnel and materials needed for operation. In training a community team in the process of developing and funding a literacy program, the statewide literacy group was insuring that local ownership was being built into efforts to serve rural areas.

### States Needing To Address the Issue of Rural Literacy

Finally, several state contacts confirmed the need to examine specific rural literacy programs in their state. Two of the state contacts (ND and SC) suggested that they were not doing everything possible to fund and support rural literacy programs. One contact said, "We have been struggling with this question for years," and went on to suggest that rural literacy programs were difficult and expensive. The state's solution, he added, was directed at getting a telecommunications network in place that might offer a cost-effective means for literacy work in rural areas. Another literacy contact replied, "This is a real concern. We need to look at new initiatives for rural areas by our next fiscal year." This contact also said that in reviewing grant requests this year, the committee had favored rural programs that had the greatest funding needs.

## What Does All This Mean?

State responses were clearly diverse, making it difficult to generalize across the nation as a whole. In general, states did appear to be expanding their literacy programs during the period from 1988–90. In some states, this increased demand was met through the creation of new programs. In

others, existing programs simply began serving more clients. Only two states actually reported a decrease in the number of literacy programs available.

For the most part, states appear to be making little distinction between rural and urban programming. New programs respond to problems defined societally—homelessness, welfare, family literacy, or workplace literacy. States assume that programs created to respond to these problems will serve rural clients as effectively as urban ones. Efforts that focus on traditional rural barriers, such as isolation or low population density, do exist but generally seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

# The Rural Literacy Client

Literacy programs exist to serve clients. This section explores rural literacy clients, their reasons for seeking literacy assistance, and strategies that rural programs find helpful in recruiting and retaining clients. Surveys returned from 700+ rural literacy programs allowed us to develop a description of the rural adults typically served by literacy programs, the reasons they give for seeking literacy assistance, and program directors' perceptions of why clients drop out of programs. The survey also asked program directors to describe the strategies they use to recruit clients. Telephone interviews with a smaller sample of programs (150) enabled us to explore both recruitment and retention strategies in more detail.

## Description of the Rural Literacy Client

The information collected from rural literacy programs enables us to describe rural literacy clients in terms of ethnic background, age, work-related characteristics, and life situations. Rural programs serve the entire range of ethnic backgrounds—Hispanic, European, Middle Eastern, Asian, African, African–American, and Anglo. Most programs (87%) identify mature adults (ages 25–50) as the majority of those served by their program. A few programs (12%) serve primarily young adults (ages 16–25), while very few (2%) list older adults (65+) as their primary clientele. When asked to describe the grade-level equivalent of most of their clients, programs typically selected either 4th to 8th grade education (46%) or some high school education (31%). Few programs serve clients who had already completed high school (3%), and only twenty percent of the programs serve clients who have less than the equivalent of a fourth-grade education.

Clients in rural literacy programs are drawn from a wide range of work and/or life-related situations. Work-related characteristics include many levels of employment: primary wage-earner, second-income earner, blue-collar worker, fixed-income recipient, welfare recipient, and dislocated worker. Rural clients are also drawn from a wide range of life situations—displaced person, pregnant teenager, single mother, widow, military spouse, housewife, homeless, middle-income, and low-income. Table 8 presents a profile of rural literacy clients.

**TABLE 8**
**Profile of Rural Literacy Clients**

| | |
|---|---|
| Ethnicity: | Varied |
| Age: | 25–50 years old (86 percent) |
| Reading level: | 4th to 8th grade (46 percent) |
| Work-related characteristics: | Wide range but include primary wage-earner, second-income earner, blue-collar worker, fixed-income recipient, welfare recipient, and dislocated worker |
| Life situation: | Wide range but include displaced person, pregnant teenager, single mother, widow, military spouse, housewife, homeless, middle income, and low income |

## How Do Literacy Programs Recruit Clients?

Program directors were asked to describe their recruitment strategies by selecting any or all of a number of different strategies provided in a list. Most programs use a variety of techniques, so it was common for program directors to select several from the list. Consequently, the percentages describe the number of rural programs that use each strategy. Ninety-nine percent use "word of mouth;" 94 percent, media advertising—radio/tv/newspaper; 88 percent, welfare/social service agency referrals; 78 percent, civic/church organizations referrals; 68 percent, employer referrals; 55 percent, corrections/law enforcement referrals; and 21 percent, other. The 21 percent "other" included: information flyers, social clubs (Kiwannis, Rotary, book clubs, etc.), posters, flyers, and brochures.

"Word of mouth" strategies are used nearly universally. As one director pointed out, "The population has a high rate of illiteracy. When one person has success in the literacy or ABE program, that person usually tells friends and several

*Rural literacy providers suggested that what works best in recruitment is personal contact and networking with other agencies.*

of these are usually in the same position. Hence, publicity for the program is of the best kind." In addition, "word-of-mouth" referrals are valuable because they draw members of extended families into literacy programs. "We have had third generation referrals . . . one person in the program has referred another and that person in turn, has referred a third."

Telephone interviews with selected programs enabled us to build a more detailed picture of the range of recruitment strategies used by rural literacy programs. As shown in Table 9, the strategies currently being used can be sorted into three types: media, referrals, and special activities.

**TABLE 9**
**Client Recruitment Strategies**

| | Methods |
|---|---|
| Media | newspapers |
| | radio/TV |
| | posters/flyers/signs |
| Referrals | word-of-mouth |
| | church groups |
| | education groups |
| | literacy councils |
| | employers |
| | county jails |
| | human services |
| | health groups |
| | probation officers |
| | tutors |
| Activities | group presentations |
| | booths at fairs |
| | hot lines |
| | mailings |

We also asked program directors to suggest strategies that might increase the number of clients accessing rural literacy services. "Make instruction free and allow open entrance to the literacy programs," suggested several program directors. Restricting applicants by reading level, age, gender, or first language only complicated getting people into literacy programs. Commenting on fees, one program director said, "Fees add yet another barrier to the already difficult question of client recruitment."

Another way to enhance a program's ability to recruit clients is to advertise the program without reference to "low reading ability" or "illiteracy"—terms which characterize the client in a negative way. One director suggested it was best to advertise a program for people "interested in improving individual reading skills."

Rural literacy providers suggested that what works best in recruitment is personal contact and networking with other agencies. Personal contact conveys to clients that they are important. Networking with other agencies helps agencies recognize the extent to which illiteracy may be contributing to a client's problems at the same time that it helps literacy programs identify clients who need assistance.

## Why Do Clients Seek Literacy Help?

To develop better strategies for recruiting clients, it is helpful to know why clients seek literacy help. The telephone interviews asked program directors, "Why do your clients seek help?" Directors identified a number of reasons as summarized in Table 10. Some programs identified a single reason while others listed several different reasons given by clients. Consequently, the frequencies listed in Table 10 simply reflect the number of programs that identified a given reason.

**TABLE 10**
**Why Clients Seek Literacy Help**

| Frequency | Reason |
|---|---|
| 145 | Promotion or to get s better job |
| 42 | Help their children |
| 37 | Personal satisfaction |
| 36 | Earn a GED or diploma |
| 35 | Learn a particular skill |
| 29 | Read the bible |
| 25 | Want to read to (grand)children |
| 24 | Empowerment |
| 19 | Referred by employer, welfare, courts |
| 14 | Learn to read before children found out |
| 13 | To continue education in community college or vo-tech |

Rural learners seek literacy instruction for a variety of reasons but are generally motivated by job-related needs or quality-of-life issues. Increased competition for jobs, skills needed for promotion/advancement, changes in the workplace, and the need to provide for their family are a few of the reasons rural clients give for needing to improve their literacy skills.

A second cluster of reasons clients typically give for seeking literacy training involve quality-of-life issues. Some want to help their children do homework or read a book. Others want to be empowered in their own life. As one program director noted, "They found that there was very little that they could do for themselves if they could not read." Personal satisfaction emerged as another key quality-of-life issue. Earning a GED or diploma, learning a specific skill, or reading the Bible are additional reasons cited for seeking literacy training.

## How Do Literacy Programs Retain Clients?

Once clients are recruited, programs face the challenge of retaining them during what can be a slow process of building skills. Strategies for retention are often linked to the reasons clients leave. This section explores program directors' perceptions of why clients drop out and strategies they see as effective in increasing retention rates.

### Completion Rate in Literacy Programs

In an effort to explore client persistence, the survey asked program directors, "What percent of your clients leave your program without completing it?" The average response was 22 percent. A follow-up question was asked, "How do you define completion?" Most directors reported that their idea of completion was defined as reaching a certain level, mastering particular skills, or spending a specified length of time in tutoring.

The length of time necessary to complete the program varied considerably – given in hours, weeks, months, or semesters. The hours required to finish a program ranged from 12 to 150. One director noted that 40 hours of instruction was necessary in order to meet amnesty requirements for legalization. In terms of weeks, one program met twice per week for one hour for six weeks. Clients in one summer program met weekly for eight weeks. Other programs of study ranged from four months to two years. Attendance requirements were generally not specified. However, one director required six months of continuous instruction, and two other directors mentioned client/tutor contracts. "The client is asked to sign a learner/tutor agreement in which the client agrees to complete at least 72 hours in the program."

A second category of completion involved the client attaining a certain competency or advancing a prescribed number of reading levels. Approximately 20% of the survey respondents listed receiving the GED as completion of their program. Another 20% or so considered completion to be instruction through four books of the Laubach series. Other programs used set reading grade levels as completion: fourth, fifth/sixth, and eighth grade reading levels were mentioned as benchmarks for client progress. Some directors mentioned completion goals for reading comprehension and decoding skills, such as "the ability to read material at sixth-grade level such as job applications, newspapers, and ballots." Other directors described completion in terms of advancement—"an improvement of 1.5 grade levels in 12 months" or "advancing two grade levels." A few directors also described advancement in terms of "client effort and attitude toward the end of the program" or "the ability for clients to function at their intellectual capacity." In all, completion had occurred when a client was "no longer challenged by our material."

A number of program directors described completion as clients moving into GED programs or vocational–technical schools. A couple of directors described completion as improvement in speaking English or completion of a course in English as a second language. Still other directors felt their program ended for clients when they were promoted into ABE classes. In this regard one commented, "Being ready to attend ABE classes or able to function in the ABE classroom setting is my benchmark for completion." A few felt completion was reached when clients could meet certain state minimal standards in reading, writing, and mathematics.

*In all, the underlying notion of program completion was "learning that for which they have come to the program."*

Other program directors focused on competency-based, workplace skills. Completion of them occurred when an adult learner felt comfortable and competent at completing necessary tasks in the workplace. Other program directors described this level of completion as "achieving functional literacy," "being a very proficient reader," "confident to read independently," and "achieving the life skills needed and desiring to learn on their own daily."

The third category of completion was when clients felt that individually defined goals had been accomplished. These goals are often developed during the counseling held prior to the assignment of a tutor. One director wrote that "each client sets long-term and short-term goals." Another director noted that these learning plans "are reviewed and changed as clients discover what their real objectives are." This idea was echoed by another respondent who wrote that there were "always new goals." In all, the underlying notion of program completion was "learning that for which they have come to the program."

## Why Do Clients Leave Programs?

When program directors were asked to identify why clients leave literacy programs, they reported that this information was difficult to collect because they typically did not do exit interviews. Consequently, the reasons listed in Table 11 reflect program directors' perceptions of why clients leave and not what the clients themselves might have reported. Directors were asked to list the top five reasons, thus the percentages listed describe the percentage of programs for whom that reason was considered to be one of the five more common reasons rural clients leave literacy programs.

**TABLE 11**
**Common Reason Clients Leave Literacy Programs**

| Percentage of Programs | Reasons |
|---|---|
| 78 | personal problems |
| 74 | lack of motivation |
| 58 | moved |
| 48 | got a job |
| 41 | transportation problems |
| 40 | client met personal goals |
| 35 | childcare problems |
| 27 | illness/health (self or family) |
| 21 | access to program—distance/ location of services |
| 20 | lack of success in the program |
| 17 | personal skills too low for program |
| 16 | program did not meet their needs |
| 13 | other |
| 12 | needed more individualized help |
| 11 | client sent to/released from institution |

Other reasons listed include: slow progress toward goals, got out of jail, employment schedule, entered other educational programs, and discouraged.

It is extremely important to emphasize that the second most common reason, "lack of motivation," reflects an assumption by the program director that is not easily verified through the client. Few clients would describe themselves as unmotivated, and in fact, this reason is typically selected when the program director knows no other reason for a client's departure. Literacy providers who are inherently "client-centered" would argue that such a response says more about the program than about the client. Others would argue that such a response occurs when clients are required to attend, rather than choose to attend.

## Strategies for Retaining Literacy Clients

When asked what types of strategies are effective in retaining clients, rural program directors typically cited the following three approaches: (1) be honest and realistic about the time involved, (2) be flexible, and (3) respect the client.

Program directors believe that clients and volunteer tutors both need to understand that progress takes time. One director said that adults wanted to learn to read overnight. If the instructor did not keep up the pace, the client would drop out. One director continued this thought by saying, "Both tutors and clients need to understand that success takes time." Another program director commented, "The older clients tended to be impatient; they wanted faster results." Clients became discouraged when they did not progress quickly. Short-term goals or incremental steps are helpful in demonstrating progress, but those involved need to set realistic expectations for the end goal.

Literacy programs need to be flexible in order to retain clients. Program directors reported that it is necessary to be flexible in schedules, meeting times, methodologies, and site selection. One program director stated that tutors need to have flexible schedules because clients, due to their social or economic positions, had problems which tutors did not have. As a result, tutors could not expect clients to approach things the way they did. One director reported that meeting times need to be flexible because clients worked long hours and varied shifts.

Program directors also mentioned that they had to be flexible about where instruction could occur. Comments often reflected as much about what didn't work as what did work.

*Literacy program directors reported that they need to be flexible in both where and when literacy instruction can occur.*

One director explained that at one time, classes were held in schools. The literacy programs were timed to coincide with the school day so that children and parents would finish at the same time. Another director reported that afternoon classes were not well attended because women had too much to do during that time of day. Some directors establish instructional sites in neighboring counties because clients are concerned about their privacy. Others said that issues of privacy were never a concern. What seems clear in this seemingly conflicting information is that what works varies from one community to the next. Literacy program directors reported that they need to be flexible in both where and when literacy instruction can occur.

Finally, literacy program directors identified mutual respect as the core of an effective retention program. Programs grounded in mutual respect between the tutor and client enabled both to transcend the cultural differences they may bring to the experience. Most literacy program directors reported that they work hard at matching clients and tutors, but ultimately differences do exist. They felt that maintaining programs in which mutual respect was visible among all those involved was an important strategy for retaining both tutors and clients.

## What Does All This Mean?

The profile of rural literacy clients given by literacy providers suggests that the clients are as diverse as the communities from which they come. Most programs serve mature adults who bring a wide range of job-related and personal circumstances to the literacy program. These clients may share a common community, but they are very likely to be unique in the circumstances and concerns they bring to a literacy program. They are also likely to leave programs for a variety of reasons. Rural programs must be able to respond to a wide range of clients and client concerns.

To a large extent, recruitment and retention strategies rely heavily upon the character of the relationships established within the program. Rural programs depend on "word of mouth" recruitment strategies and the casual exchanges that occur at social functions. Such programs may be slow to build up clientele and may lack the business-like appearance of a formal program. Rural programs also need to be flexible in order to adapt to the needs of the client. Informal relationships and flexibility appear to be critical to recruiting clients and maintaining support for programs in rural areas.

# Materials for Literacy Instruction

As part of the extended telephone interviews we conducted, rural literacy program directors were asked to identify and comment on the materials they used. What follows is a list of materials and/or publishers described in these interviews. This listing is not an exhaustive listing of all the literacy materials produced by publishers, nor does it represent any endorsement by a majority of rural literacy providers. Since our conversations with literacy providers, new materials and companies have entered the market. Moreover, programs vary substantially in the materials they use. This section offers a starting place for literacy providers wishing to explore potential materials for their centers. Catalogues can be obtained by contacting these publishers.

## Printed Materials

The following publishers were listed with specific titles of materials:

**Best-Bronx Education Service Training**
965 Longwood Ave., Rm. 309
New York, NY 10459
(212) 991-7310

Rural program directors mentioned: BEST materials developed by Patty Median with support by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (National Diffusion Network).
A director noted that she wanted to move her clients from 1:1 instruction to group instruction and used this linguistics-based program to do so. Using this curriculum, clients choose a theme, ie. parenting, and then built a curriculum around it.

**Contemporary Books**
180 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60601
(800) 621-1918

Contemporary Books publishes GED materials.

Rural program directors mentioned: Pre-GED and GED-Satellite Program.

**Fearon/Janus/Quercus**
500 Harbor Boulevard
Belmont, CA 94002–9866
(800) 877-4283

This publisher has a variety of high interest/low reading level reading materials, including comic books of classic tales with cassette tapes.

Rural program directors mentioned: *The Career Readers*, which includes 10 career exploration books, 5 read-along cassettes, and a booklet of skill sheets.

**Glencoe Division**
MacMillan/McGraw–Hill Publishing Co.
936 E. Wind Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
(800) 334-7344

The Glencoe Division recently purchased the adult basic education and GED materials of Scott Foresman Publisher and Merrill Publishing Co. Adult basic education textbooks and instructor manuals are offerings of relevance to the literacy provider.

Rural program directors mentioned: *Passing the GED textbook*.

**Harvard University Press**
79 Garden St.
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-2600

Rural program directors mentioned: *People in Predicaments*.

**KET, The Kentucky Network Enterprise Division**
2230 Richmond Road, Suite 213
Lexington, KY 40502–1311
(800) 354-9067

KET features video programs and accompanying textbooks.

Rural program directors mentioned: *GED On TV*, which is a series of 43, 30-minute videotapes, workbooks, teacher's guide and a computer component. At the completion of the course, a client will have been instructed in the skills necessary to prepare for the General Educational Development test.

**Literacy Volunteers of America**
5795 Widewaters Parkway
Syracuse, NY 13214
(315) 445-8000

LVA offers a variety of resources designed for one-on-one and small group literacy tutoring. Their catalog features books, cassettes, videos, workbooks, and training manuals for tutors.

Rural program directors mentioned: *Read On*, a textbook, workbook, and audio tape series for adult new readers. LVA training manuals, videos, and training modules. LVA's tutor training was highlighted for its tutor instructions on how to evaluate materials, how to write lesson plans, and for the whole language approach.

**New Reader's Press (a division of Laubach Literacy Action)**
Box 888
Syracuse, NY 13210
(800) 448-8878

Laubach offers various reading series, a beginning reader's newspaper, training videos, teacher's manual etc. The LLA Information Center provides training tips and advice on volunteer program management and instructional methods.

Rural program directors mentioned: *Laubach Way to Read* series, *The Challenger* series, *Laubach Way to English* series (ESL), *Reader Development Bibliography: Books Recommended by Adult New Readers*, and *The News for You* newspaper for new readers. The materials were identified for their low reading level. The teacher's manual was noted for its detail, which proved helpful to volunteers who had never taught before. The phonic approach used in Laubach materials had mixed reviews. Some rural directors said that if clients were poor with sound discrimination this method was "hard" for them. A contrasting point of view came from another director who remarked that the phonics approach was the "easiest and best."

**Prentice Hall–Cambridge Book Company**
200 Old Tappan Rd.
Old Tappan, NJ 07675
(800) 922-0579

Rural program directors mentioned: *Entering a Reader's World* and *Living in a Reader's World.*

**HarperCollins**
P.O. Box 588
Scranton, PA 18512
(800) 331-3761

Rural program directors mentioned: *Reading Rainbow Videotapes*, which are children's books on videotape.

**SRA School Group**
P.O. Box 5380
Chicago, IL 60680–5380
(800) 621-0476

Rural program directors mentioned: *SRA Reading Kits.*

**Steck–Vaughn Company**
P.O. Box 26015
Austin, TX 78755
(800) 531-5015

Rural program directors mentioned: *Reading for Today, Reading for Tomorrow* for new readers, *Communication for Today, Communication for Tomorrow* an ESL series, *Real Life English*, and *Vocabulary Connections.*

The following publishers were identified but specific titles of materials were not mentioned. Catalogues can be obtained by contacting the companies at the addresses listed.

**Barron's Educational Series Inc.**
P.O. Box 8040
Hauppauge, NY 11788
(800) 645-3476

**Heinle and Heinle**
20 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116
(800) 354-9706
**(ESL materials formerly published by MacMillan)**

**Jamestown Publishers**
P.O. Box 9168
Providence, RI 02940
(800) 872-7323
(skill books and classic stories with cassette tapes).

**Modern Curriculum Press**
13900 Prospect Rd.
Cleveland, OH 44136
(800) 321-3106

**Southwestern Publishers**
4770 Duke Dr., Suite 200
Mason, OH 45040
(800) 543-7972

The following materials were listed without reference to publishers:

*Spaulding Method, High Scope Series, The Winning Program, Learning for Living Series*, and *Power Writing Series. Kin Cook Audiovisual System* (self-instructional phonics lessons).

## Computer Software

Forty-two percent of the programs reported using computer-assisted materials. They use computer software for word processing, resume writing, reading instruction, writing personal stories, grammar, math, basic adult skills for employment, career information, and driver's manual instruction. Computers equipped with voice synthesizers are used for math, vocabulary, comprehension, and spelling instruction. Clients like the hands-on approach computers provide. Program directors said that the computer enabled

the clients to work at their own pace with little reliance on the teachers. The directors went on to say that "clients feel good that they could do it themselves."

Computer software companies mentioned include:

**Aquarius Instructional**
P.O. Box 128
Indian Rocks Beach, FL 34635–0128
(800) 338-2644

**Apple Computer**
Sunburst
P.O. Box 660002
Scotts Valley, CA 95067–0002

**MECC**
3490 Lexington Ave. North
St. Paul, MN 55126
(800) 228-3504

**Queue Inc.**
338 Commerce Dr.
Fairfield, CT 06430
(800) 232-2224

The following materials were mentioned, but no companies were listed:
*Primary Editor*, a computer program used to facilitate story writing, software by Project Star, and Kin Cook materials.

## Community Resource Materials

Literacy providers have found their community to be a rich and often free source of literacy materials. Programs wishing to supplement their literacy materials should consider the following community resources:

### School-Related Materials

Local schools are generous donors of literacy materials. These materials include picture dictionaries, workbooks, and textbooks. Additionally, an indirect and unique use of school materials is the use of children's homework papers. By using homework papers as a teaching tool, literacy centers help adults gain skills immediately applicable to an often expressed personal goal—being able to help children with homework.

### Daily-Survival Materials

Some providers teach literacy skills using a very practical life-skills curriculum. Life-skill materials frequently used include: menus, cookbooks, telephone books, mail, catalogs, food stamp applications, childcare materials, charts and graphs, and driver's manuals. In Wisconsin, a driver's manual is published for the low-level reader.

### Work-Related Materials

Literacy providers frequently work in tandem with vocational/technical schools that are teaching vocational literacy. Materials used to facilitate this learning include: duty sheets for hospital personnel, exam manuals, job-related order blanks, carpentry worksheets, and food-service instruction sheets.

### Library Materials

Many librarians are actively involved in working with adult readers at all levels and have ordered high interest, low reading-level books, newreader materials, and tutor/instructor materials. Community libraries, like school libraries, frequently donate learning materials to literacy programs.

### Teacher and Client-Made Materials

In an attempt to personalize their approach to literacy instruction, some committed teachers make their own materials or help clients make theirs. Examples of these materials include client-designed textbooks, journals, resumes, family histories, class newsletters, and exchange letters. Teachers frequently report taping stories for clients to take home. Teachers also help literacy clients make cassettes for use in ESL classes. One site reported that the director and the clients write grant proposals together.

## What Does All This Mean?

A wide variety of both electronic and written materials are clearly in use. Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach Literacy Action materials are the most frequently mentioned by rural program directors. We received relatively few descriptions of teacher-made or client-developed materials.

Given the uniqueness of rural communities, it seems puzzling that rural literacy programs are not using literacy programs as a strategy for developing locally meaningful reading materials. Materials developed by clients could offer valuable resources to schools looking for reading materials that reflect the local history and culture.

# Parent and Child Literacy Activities

Both the survey and intensive telephone interviews included a series of questions designed to explore the extent to which family literacy programs are finding their way into rural literacy efforts. During the past decade, the attention given to the intergenerational effects of limited literacy skills has increased. Parents are now recognized as their child's first teacher. Family literacy programs have been introduced as one strategy for reaching parents and children simultaneously. Given the rural maxim, "think locally, act socially," we expected family literacy programs to offer an approach especially well suited to rural environments.

What we found instead was relatively little use of family literacy strategies. In their most intensive form, family literacy programs provide direct instruction to parents and children, offer help in developing parenting skills, and include interactive parent and child activities. In response to our question, "Do any of your activities bring parents and their children together in an effort to improve literacy skills?", 27 percent of the rural program directors answered yes and 70 percent said no. Of those who did report activities that involve both parents and children, responses ranged from "we touch on it," to "children are included in special events," to "we don't but we're connected to someone who does," to the more intensive programs described earlier. The sections that follow capture the range of responses we received.

## No Family Literacy Program

At one extreme are rural literacy programs that offer no family component. As one respondent noted, "This is adult education. Very few services are provided to school-age children." Another director added, "We discourage the presence of children at our learning center." These programs draw a clear distinction between programs directed at adults and programs directed at children. Other program directors acknowledged that their clients want to develop the skills needed to work with their children, but considered that a personal issue. As one respondent noted, "We hope that our students who are parents read to their children, but this would be an individual effort performed in the home." Similarly, another respondent indicated that joint parent–child efforts occurred only incidentally when tutoring was conducted in the home.

## Encouraging Family Literacy

Several directors reported that the reason some of their clients are in the literacy program is because they want to be able to read to their children. One program director described the link she sees between parent and child literacy, noting that "when literacy workers promote reading within the adult learner's family, dramatic improvement in the family's reading ability occurred." Consequently, one way in which rural literacy programs support family literacy is to acknowledge and build on the personal goals parents bring. Several programs actually use the goal of reading to their children as a recruitment tool.

Several programs go beyond offering verbal support. One program gives children's books to adult learners to take home and share with their children. Another program invites other family members to attend literacy classes with the client—to observe, to enroll, or perhaps to teach.

## Special and Regular Family Literacy Events

Some programs move beyond encouragement, developing special events which involve children or integrating children into regular activities. By welcoming children to special events such as covered dish dinners, picnics, award dinners, graduation programs, and library Christmas parties, program directors eliminate childcare problems and enhance parents' pride in their own accomplishments. One director noted, "One man kept his children out of school, so that they could see him receive his level 1 certificate."

Examples of other special events include puppet shows in a mall, which encourage parents to read to their children; StoryBreak for children in a park, which demonstrates methods of reading to children in a lively manner; and mother–preschool child seminars, which instill the love and importance of reading to young children. These efforts are focused on reducing the number of school-aged children who have reading deficits. Summer reading clubs offer another strategy to promote reading within the family. Some literacy programs provide parents with brochures that offer advice on how to work on reading skills with their children.

Project directors also reported celebrations in connection with the "Year of the Young Reader." One program distributed family reading packets that contain books and bookmarks. To increase library use, McDonald's restaurants provided food coupons to libraries. The coupons were then distributed to families visiting the library.

Other literacy programs provide services to parents and children on a regular basis, not just at special events. One example is an adult/parenting education program offered to parents of high risk pre-kindergarten youngsters. This program offers a series of activities which promote family involvement in their children's education. Several programs offer a storytime center for preschoolers while their parents are at the social service office. When the parents return to pick up their child, they are encouraged to participate in

their child's reading activities at home. Other programs target the new mother at the hospital. A reading packet of children's books and tips on reading to children are distributed to the mothers prior to leaving the hospital.

## Family Literacy Partners

A number of rural literacy programs describe family literacy activities in terms of collaboration with other agencies. Two of the more common partners are the local Head Start program and the local or regional library.

Adult education directors report that they work with Head Start programs in a variety of ways. For example, one homebound/Head Start program serves both non-high school graduate parents and their preschool children. While one instructor provides instruction for children, another instructor prepares the parent to take the GED test. Another adult literacy program collaborates with the local Head Start to offer a "Reading with your Child" class. Similarly, one Head Start program conducts workshops to promote the importance of reading to children. The workshops demonstrate how to read stories to children, provide children's books, and show parents how to make educational toys. Some Head Start programs actively recruit children's parents to attend literacy classes. Literacy classes are then scheduled while Head Start classes are in session.

Many adult literacy programs have close ties with a library. Program directors noted the special effort their libraries make to bring parents and their children together in fun activities. Examples of such programs include "Families for Literacy" and the "Family Reading Partnership." The latter program provides special information to parents of preschool and kindergarten children about choosing appropriate books, reading aloud techniques, pre-reading activities, sibling read-aloud sessions, and methods of using the library. The LAP-SIT (Literacy and Parenting–Sharing Initiative Together) program brings parents and children together twice a month in local libraries to read, sing, and play games. Other libraries provide storytime for parents and young children.

One program director reported that her library system offers reading instruction to the preschooler's parents while the children attend a story hour. In this program, the directors teach parents how to read two or three specific children's books. Once the parents master the children's books, they are given copies to take home. Another library supplies free children's books to attract parents and children into the library. One library offers parents certificates of achievement if they read 12 library books to their children. Book mobiles equipped with computer-assisted instruction are also used to bring families together for reading instruction.

## Family Literacy Programs

The most intensive family literacy programs provide direct instruction to both parents and children, offer instruction in parenting skills, and involve parents and children in joint activities. Most family literacy programs gear their services to parents and pre-school age children.

Responses from rural program directors suggest that some rural programs welcome elementary children as well as teenagers. Tutoring the client's children in individual sessions is the most common strategy used with older children. The activities range from practicing reading to completing homework assignments. In some programs, arrangements are made with tutors to work with the parent on their child's homework assignment so that the parent could then help the child. This type of service is done both in the literacy center and in the client's home. One program encourages adult learners who have mastered basic reading, grammar, and math skills to tutor in the children's program. Other literacy program directors allow teenagers sixteen years and older to participate in the literacy program with their parents.

A few programs extend family literacy strategies to ESL classes. Children often help tutor their parents in English, encouraging their parents to succeed and gaining a better grasp of the language themselves. Program directors report higher retention rates as family members encourage one another to continue.

A final group of rural programs have an on-going plan to bring families together to promote literacy. The underlying assumption made by these programs is that parents with literacy deficiencies may be more likely to participate in a literacy program if they are empowered to help their children learn to read. One director expressed this thought, "For many parents, the desire to impact their child's education is a primary reason for enrolling in literacy instruction."

Coaching parents to use child-rearing techniques which would have a positive influence on their children's learning and self-esteem is a primary task of many family literacy programs. One program director wrote, "We recently ran a `parenting' course for our adult basic and GED groups. It was extremely successful, as clients even brought their husbands or wives to the sessions." Another director echoed

this enthusiasm, hitting at the heart of the family literacy idea: "I attempted a storytelling hour for mothers on government assistance for their children. If you want to reach the parents, you can get to them through their children." Also, "Children enjoy helping parents learn to read. This program increases the interest in education and may help to lower the dropout rate." One crusading program director visited 125 elementary schools in the area, discussing the intergenerational effect of limited literacy skills with each principal. She also left letters describing the family literacy program with the teachers of "at risk" children. A primary task of family literacy programs, according to many directors, is to try to make parents feel better about themselves and empowered to become their children's first teacher.

## What Does All This Mean?

Family literacy programs emerging throughout rural areas have the potential and promise to break the cycle of illiteracy that persists in many rural families and their communities. When our survey work was conducted, however, few rural programs had what might be called the full model of family literacy: instruction for parents and children, parent education, and interactive parent and child activities. Many were just entering the family literacy scene with beginning attempts to incorporate parent/child storyhours or mother–preschool child seminars which instilled the love and importance of reading to young children. The potential offered by family literacy programs is yet untapped by most rural literacy providers.

*The potential offered by family literacy programs is yet untapped by most rural literacy providers.*

# Rural Environments

Rural literacy programs must respond to the unique nature of their rural environment. Features of that environment offer advantages as well as challenges. Advantages focus on size—smaller programs that allow participants the opportunity to engage in literacy work in an informal way. The disadvantages are familiar ones—a dispersed and isolated learner population which leads to problems of time, cost, and program delivery. To better understand the positive and negative features of rural literacy programs, directors were asked: 1) How does being rural make your job easier? and 2) How does being rural make your job harder?

## How Does Being Located in a Rural Area Make Your Job Easier?

Operating in a rural area can pose challenges, but most rural literacy providers are able to identify opportunities as well as problems. These opportunities can be organized into five broad categories: smaller programs, good character of clients, easier networking, better media coverage, and a nice area to live.

### Smaller Programs

Several rural literacy directors report that they enjoy working with a smaller number of clients. One director stated, "We do not have an overwhelming number of clients needing services. We can serve everyone that comes to us. There is no need for a waiting list." Another noted that "in a rural community, the population tends to be more stable and smaller and it is easier to contact clients who dropped out of school." One director felt that she is able to adjust programs to better suit individual needs and offer one-on-one tutoring, making it easier for an instructor to devote more time, attention, and offer faster emergency help. She commented, "The smallness of the program allows for more intimacy and interaction with clients."

Smaller programs have the advantage of being more flexible in regard to days and hours of operation. One director wrote, "The Learning Center director has total leeway to do as he pleases in the Center. The small size of the program allows for more intimacy and interaction with clients." Another respondent wrote, "We can offer the classes when and where the need is." This flexibility is especially important because of the seasonal character of some rural occupations, such as farming.

A program director's job is described as easier because with fewer people and the close interaction with local agencies, it is possible to know who to contact when something needs to be done. The tutors often assist clients with other problems in addition to responding to immediate literacy needs.

The smaller size of the programs is listed as an attribute in other ways. One advantage to a smaller program is that it is easier to manage because fewer staff are required. Tutor training workshops are small; thereby, training is more informal and allows for extensive personal interaction and good support for the tutors. Directors like the idea that being rural means a smaller, informal organization "where people know you and are friendly." The programs are not so crowded that tutors or clients get "lost."

Rural literacy directors also report that the smaller size of their programs allows them to add a personal touch to the instruction. One director wrote, "Each section of the county has its own needs, personality, and social structure. It is easier to pair the client/tutor team in such an environment." Directors get to know the needs of volunteers and learners. "By knowing all the individuals involved in our program, we are able to make workable matches between tutors and clients." Clients and tutors see each other in town, which often helps clients maintain interest in their literacy efforts. Friendships often continue after lessons are over. With paths crossing frequently, there is more of an opportunity for tutors to see the outcome of their efforts. Directors feel that as a group, clients and tutors are comfortable with each other. There is a feeling of closeness.

Rural literacy directors also note that they like the "laid back" feeling of the people in their program—an attitude that can sometimes be attributed to the size of the program. "People are easy-going, not as busy, easier to talk to and work with," one director stated. Crediting this to the fact that clients and tutors are generally at the same socioeconomic level, another director wrote that her clients think of instruction as a social activity. She said, "Many of the clients are related and English classes are a chance to get together and visit." There is a mutual understanding between tutor and client because often they know each other's background and family situation. One director said, "Even if we meet as strangers, we usually have a common background." As a result, a bond develops between tutor and client.

In all, the atmosphere in a rural program is perceived to be informal. To help create this informal atmosphere, one director wrote, "Our association is constantly working on ways to help clients become a part of the organization and not feel that they are here just to learn to read."

### Good Character of People

The second advantage literacy directors contribute to being rural is the good character of people. One director wrote, "I personally think that rural folks are easier to deal with."

Rural people are "welcoming, compatible, receptive to new ideas," and "ready to work with strangers." One respondent added that rural folks are "trusting" as well as cooperative and "less leery of your intentions."

In addition, rural clients are thought to be independent and realistic in their goal setting. Program directors characterize their clients as people who believe that "you cannot rely on someone to hand it to you from the outside,"—you must help yourself. Clients are accustomed to hard work and apply this work ethic to the task at hand. Directors report that rural clients are dependable and willing to make a long-term commitment to literacy work. Clients are perceived to be more likely to finish a class they start.

Rural residents have a traditional "take care of your own" or a "help your neighbor" attitude. Directors report a strong sense of community pride which promotes small-town camaraderie. Some maintain networks of self-help through extended families. Others draw upon resources from the entire community. People are not too busy with their own lives to help others. One director attributes this "giving spirit" to the strong religious ties in her area. Another points out that the limited resources available in rural areas mean that everyone has to pull together. Ultimately, program directors agree, "Volunteerism is the rural way."

## Easier Networking

The third positive feature of rural settings is the ease with which networking is done. A couple of respondents wrote that they had lived in the area all their lives and know many people. They feel that this familiarity helps in establishing credibility. Directors believe that because they are known personally, people are willing to volunteer and lend support. "You very quickly become known in the community as the literacy person. Every year, rotary and junior woman's clubs look for projects. We try to keep them aware that we need them. I ask them to raise money or to apply for grants," said one director.

*Rural program directors perceive less programming segmentation, "turfism," and "politics."*

Networking and familiarity within the community encourages client recruitment. In a rural area, "everyone knows everyone else, and often they are related by blood or marriage," one director reported. Clients are often friends and know "what is going on" with each other. They encourage each other. In fact, one director wrote that, "People know each others' needs. They know who can't read and often get together by themselves." In addition, directors point out that since so many clients are related, it is easier to find out about special problems and offer other kinds of help to a client.

In addition, rural program directors seem to enjoy the networking that occurs between public and private agencies. They take pleasure in being accessible to other agencies and have those agencies reciprocate. Social service agencies are not so large and encumbered with red tape that they can't find solutions to problems. Also, rural program directors perceive less programming segmentation, "turfism," and "politics." "Service boundaries don't exist," said one director.

Networks also help literacy programs access other resources. Local businesses, schools, and churches seem more willing to support a program whose director is familiar to them. In particular, small businesses help recruit employees for tutoring, are flexible in their work schedules, donate financial support, and offer their facilities for classroom use. Churches and schools help recruit clients and provide classroom space as well. Interestingly, one school asked the local literacy program to train teachers in the Laubach method of teaching reading to adults, hoping to identify strategies that could be integrated into remedial reading programs for children offered in the school.

In short, networking with other agencies and community organizations is a feature of rural communities that literacy providers value. Networking with other agencies increases local awareness of illiteracy and helps literacy providers identify those in need of services.

## Better Media Coverage

The fourth advantage identified by rural literacy program directors is better media coverage. The general consensus seems to be: "It is easier to get information to the public." One director pointed out, "Our small radio station publicizes our work," while another added, "Our local newspaper has given us excellent coverage." Although the type of media mentioned varied from one program to the next, rural program directors wrote that they find it easier to reach their communities for support and awareness. There is not a lot of competition for print or air time in the local media, so literacy programs "are news!"

## Nice Place to Live

The last advantage of rural environments identified by literacy program directors is that a rural area is simply a nice place to live. In addition to the great scenery and

natural beauty, one director said, "We don't have to worry about night travel and personal safety—except for the possibility of running into deer." Others believe that there are less drugs, unemployment, homelessness, "racial bias," crowds, crime, and traffic. One director added, "Small towns are easier to navigate."

## How Does Being Located in a Rural Area Make Your Job Harder?

Although a few respondents did not think that operating in a rural environment made their job harder, most had plenty to say about their difficulties. The problems cited most frequently include: transportation, client privacy, client motivation, funding, communication supports, mutually agreeable tutoring times, and childcare support. Urban literacy programs would undoubtedly list some of these same problems, but several of these challenges can be tied directly to features common to many rural areas—limited infrastructure, higher costs and increased isolation, lack of confidentiality, and lack of employment structures supportive to education.

### Limited Infrastructure

Among the specific problems described by rural literacy providers, transportation, communication supports, and childcare support speak directly to the more limited physical and social infrastructures available in many rural communities. Physical infrastructures include the roads, bridges, community buildings, telephone lines, etc. needed to support community life. Social infrastructures refer to the social services available to respond to people's problems. Both present challenges to literacy programs in rural areas.

*The largest area covered by a rural literacy program was 4,312 square miles.*

Described as low density of clients, lack of transportation, or distances between programs, the large distances and small populations pose major challenges for rural literacy programs. As one project director noted, her main problem was "Distance, distance, and distance!" The largest area covered by a rural literacy program was 4,312 square miles. One program covered the largest county in the state; coincidentally that county had the smallest population.

Roads are often unpaved, winding, narrow, and dangerous in the winter, especially at night. Program directors, tutors, and clients find themselves spending long hours on the road. Several directors noted that many of their clients and volunteers had a 30–45 minute drive in order to get to class. In addition, tutors or clients often do not have reliable cars and find themselves without transportation.

Given these conditions, it seems hardly surprising that over a third of the respondents identified "transportation problems" as one of the most common reasons clients leave a literacy program. The survey of rural literacy programs revealed that 84 percent do not provide transportation for clients, while 14 percent do. Extended telephone interviews with selected rural literacy program directors confirmed that the lack of transportation services poses a problem—the vast area rural literacy programs must serve acts as a barrier to providing the services needed by many clients.

Although some literacy directors identify media coverage as a strength, others report that it offers a real obstacle to their programs. Some regions of the country have few formal communication systems available to publicize and advertise literacy programs. There are no local radio or television stations available in many areas. Other program directors report that they have no local newspaper. This lack of media resources makes it difficult for these program directors to reach widely scattered rural residents. Directors point out that, "Many people out in the country have never heard of us."

Communication is also hampered by the fact that many rural clients do not have telephones. Post office boxes or rural route numbers for addresses also make it more difficult for program directors to make personal calls or link tutors with clients.

Finally, childcare is a monumental concern for parents/guardians who are participating in literacy activities and is often cited as a reason for not participating. The survey of rural literacy programs revealed that 85 percent of the programs do not provide childcare and only 13 percent of rural literacy programs do offer it. Consequently, clients who need childcare have to seek it elsewhere.

Rural program directors point out that childcare may be available to clients through other sources, but at some distance from either their homes or the literacy center. The same is true of a range of other social services. Regional healthcare and social service centers are available in nearly all rural areas, but these centers may be located a sizable distance from the client. Public transportation is often nonexistent, limited to less remote areas, or does not operate at night. Logistically, it becomes difficult for clients to obtain childcare support or for literacy programs to refer clients to other social service agencies.

In short, long distances and rugged topography limit the extent to which literacy programs can reach and support rural clients. Although roads and communications technologies have linked rural communities to urban areas, they have not necessarily eased transportation and communication problems within rural areas. In addition, social services are often located in sites remote from either the client or the literacy center. Limited infrastructures, social and physical, pose formidable challenges to rural literacy programs.

**Approaches to Working With Limited Infrastructure.** Without question, rural literacy programs face many challenges. Telephone interviews suggest that the most effective strategies for overcoming the limited infrastructures build on the local community's strengths

*Rural literacy providers point to the value of cooperative arrangements for offering childcare and transportation.*

such as strong personal contacts, close networking, trusting spirit, and willingness to take care of their own. Rural literacy providers point to the value of cooperative arrangements for offering childcare and transportation. These arrangements lessen the costs any one agency must budget and often provides the critical mass necessary to justify the service. The Community Action Agency, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, and Head Start are agencies for whom shared transportation and childcare services seem especially natural.

A number of programs use flexible schedules, while others vary the location of class sites or rely on videotapes and interactive television to help alleviate transportation problems. Libraries, schools, beauty parlors, churches, banquet rooms, judges' chambers, and workplaces serve as possible tutoring locations, as well as client homes. Some literacy centers have used funds from the Gannett Foundation to set up remote sites through their regional library system. Other centers simply work hard at developing car-pool systems among the tutors, clients, and family members. Some literacy programs use grants from the Job Training Partnership Act to underwrite transportation costs.

The close networking and interagency cooperation among the existing social agencies, clubs, churches, and schools also help overcome the lack of media resources. Combined with word-of-mouth publicity from successful graduates, current clients, and program tutors, these agencies offer an informal communication network that reaches a significant number of rural people. Personal invitations, newsletters, bulletin boards, and announcements at meetings offer informal yet highly effective ways of reaching potential clients or keeping community members aware of literacy efforts. Along with the director's persistence and personal involvement in the community, these strategies help overcome the limited infrastructures in rural areas.

## Cost and Isolation

A related challenge is the higher cost and sense of isolation rural programs experience. Higher cost means that available resources must simply be stretched further. A sense of isolation means that program directors and tutors often go it alone—doing the best they can despite the many questions they might have.

Sparse populations are expensive to serve. "It is not economically reasonable," wrote one director, "to supply computers to a classroom where they and their software will be used a maximum of 150 hours per year." Another noted, "The size of the program does not justify large funding." Conditioned to think in terms of cost-effectiveness, most rural literacy centers acknowledge the higher costs involved in serving a dispersed population. Yet none see an alternative to outreach literacy centers. One project director reports outreach centers some 70 miles from the main center, pointing out that travel costs for the instructor are reimbursed from an already

*Monetary contributions may not be possible, especially in communities that are experiencing economic decline or have experienced decades of poverty.*

strained budget. Another director, who supervises eight sites pointed out that, "Being rural means having to rely primarily on my own efforts to provide the services needed." Program directors generally report that it is expensive to monitor various centers and their activities, but that there appears to be no other way of reaching dispersed populations.

Literacy program directors also report that working in rural settings is complicated by the more limited base from which to raise funds. More than half of the respondents rely on ABE funds provided primarily by a combination of state and federal sources. Less than one-third of the rural program directors report using funds raised from local corporations or businesses. In some cases, such funds are simply not available. Local businesses offer in-kind services when

possible—space in which to hold meetings, free advertising, or management assistance. Monetary contributions may not be possible, especially in communities that are experiencing economic decline or have experienced decades of poverty.

The survey showed that some rural literacy programs are operating with adequate funds. Most, however, report a

*They often lack access to new strategies, such as those emerging from intergenerational or family literacy programs.*

funding shortage for staff salaries, materials, training, childcare, transportation, and computers. Directors speak of the time devoted to fundraising, grant writing, and solicitation—tasks that take staff time away from managing the program and tutoring clients.

In addition to struggling with higher costs and a limited financial base, rural program directors report that they feel isolated. Many feel they shoulder all the responsibility for the local program, with little outside support or assistance. Isolated from one another, rural literacy tutors lack a forum in which to learn or share knowledge gained in other environments. Moreover, they often lack access to new strategies, such as those emerging from intergenerational or family literacy programs. Directors also mention the isolation among tutors, wishing that there were some way to maintain closer contact with tutors in remote areas.

Program directors voice the need for contact and the opportunity to share information with other rural practitioners. One director noted that it is often difficult to receive expert help and training, and feels that she can offer little direction to tutors who are working with clients who have severe reading problems or learning disabilities. Other directors wish they could attend more training sessions, workshops, and conferences.

Cost and isolation are familiar problems in rural areas. Literacy program directors seem willing to acknowledge and accept those challenges. The danger lies in how very fragile many of the literacy programs seem to be. Most rely heavily on the energy and dedication of a director and several volunteer tutors. Isolated from other professionals and forced to stretch limited budgets to meet the more expensive costs of rural practice, these individuals often simply run out of the time and energy needed to continuously meet the challenges.

**Approaches to Working With Higher Costs and Isolation.** Strategies for overcoming higher costs rely on the strong sense of sharing found in rural communities. Programs use donated space and materials, rely on volunteer instruction, and obtain support services from other agencies. Shared facilities and resources keep costs low. If other sources of funding are insufficient, some rural programs levy user fees.

Building partnerships with area community colleges, libraries, and schools helps some literacy programs share resources. In some cases, rural literacy programs are an outgrowth of on-going educational activities in these institutions. In other cases, rural literacy programs were formed independently and then later recognized the value of becoming affiliated with other institutions.

Few programs described strategies for overcoming their isolation. Those affected only had "wished for" solutions, such as earmarking funds to reimburse rural practitioners who travel significant distances to state meetings and training sessions, distributing training materials that describe new approaches to those who are not able to attend meetings, and providing a shopping bag of strategies appropriate to rural programs. These solutions can best be addressed by state literacy directors and state literacy coalitions.

## Lack of Confidentiality

Some of the very features that program directors cite as advantages to working in rural areas also pose challenges in recruiting clients. Small towns are places where everyone

*The lack of privacy in small towns often keeps potential clients from enrolling in the local literacy program.*

knows everyone else, where people encounter one another in a wide range of activities, and where a sense of privacy often doesn't exist. Consequently, client confidentiality can be hard to achieve.

Most programs identified client confidentiality as a concern. The lack of privacy in small towns often keeps potential clients from enrolling in the local literacy program. Whether their fears are real or imagined, clients worry that they would be stigmatized were they to reveal their limited literacy skills. Those who are older have hidden their illiteracy for decades—making it even harder to reveal their limitations. Once they do come forward, clients express

concern about where tutoring sessions will occur and who the tutor might be. They voice concerns that tutoring sessions be private and that the tutor be someone who knows little of the client's family and friends.

For some rural programs, issues of client confidentiality was a barrier that needed be broken only once. Some rural program directors spoke of the difficulty of attracting their first clients and of precautions taken to maintain confidentiality. Once an influential community member publicly acknowledged his/her limited literacy skills, however, confidentiality seemed to be less important. Other community members came forward for help and generally expressed less concern with confidentiality.

**Approaches to Insuring Confidentiality.** Literacy program directors noted that they use a variety of strategies to overcome the obstacles of confidentiality. One-on-one tutoring enables programs to rely on tutors to keep attendance, client's skill level, progress, and the meeting place confidential. Using public meeting places that serve a variety of purposes, such as the library, also helps maintain confidentiality. One director reported that they suggest that the tutor and client arrive at the tutoring location at slightly different times so they are not seen arriving together. Furthermore, a number of directors pair clients with tutors outside their community or send clients to other towns for tutoring.

## Limited Opportunity Structures

A final set of challenges mentioned by rural program directors were often framed in terms of difficulties in recruiting or retaining clients. Program directors report that it is hard to recruit clients because of apathy, negative attitudes toward education, fear of being different, and the lack of jobs which require literacy skills. In the survey of rural literacy programs, seventy-four percent of the programs directors listed "lack of motivation" as one of the primary reasons clients leave programs before completion. Although it is easy to blame individuals or communities for a lack of interest in education, most literacy providers acknowledge that a cultural and economic environment affects the extent to which rural people can invest in literacy training.

Rural communities have not been isolated from the larger social and economic change underway. Some communities are growing—fueled by economic growth or adjacency to urban areas. Others are in decline or continue to cope with persistent poverty. These last two types of rural communities face a cultural and economic environment that can be especially difficult to overcome.

Communities that once flourished because of the natural resources they harvested or the cheaper labor forces they offered to manufacturers now find themselves unable to compete in the global economy. Consequently, people whose skills were once adequate find themselves ill-prepared for other occupations. Rural program directors mention that farmers, seafood harvesters, forest workers, and those who are elderly are accustomed to independent lifestyles. One director wrote that, "People who live off the land or work in factories do not feel that literacy skills are important. In the past, they could get by without formal education." In some cases, jobs that involved physical labor and skill paid higher wages than those that required education or were simply more plentiful. In many communities, "Formal education does not seem very important. It is more acceptable to have low skills since traditional employment in the area does not require reading."

Lack of employment opportunities presents another problem to literacy programs. One director wrote, "Since our organization is a performance-driven job-placement one, the rural environment places limits on opportunities for putting clients to work." According to another, "Many of the clients have a lack of motivation for the ABE program because the next step in their progress would usually be obtaining a job, but our area has few jobs to offer." Yet another wrote, "The area is economically depressed. The state's economy is sagging. There are no jobs waiting for new readers, so this form of motivation to learn does not work here."

Extreme and persistent poverty impedes other programs. One director wrote, "This is a depressed area, so there is little funding available and among people there is a sort of hopelessness or apathy regarding their ability to change their situation." In some areas, disadvantaged migrant populations are unable to remain in one location long enough to complete a literacy program. Likewise, these working people often put in long hours on the job doing manual labor, leaving little time or energy for study.

During the past decade, many rural families have found themselves below the poverty level despite the fact that at least one member remains fully employed. Wages have not kept pace with inflation, and many struggle to make ends

*Although it seems clear that the new economy will require increased skills, those opportunities are generally not yet available in many rural communities.*

meet. Those new to poverty have little time to invest in literacy programs. Those for whom poverty has been a constant companion often accept their life situation as inevitable. "Many times individuals living in an isolated area respond with skepticism when told they can improve their status of living," reports one program director.

Cultural features common to many rural communities also create obstacles to literacy programs. Literacy directors report that it is not easy to convince small towns and rural communities to accept new ideas, nor is it easy to convince potential clients that they need more education. Perhaps, this was why a director wrote, "Even people who are aware of their need, will put you off." In contrast, another director attributes this resistance to independent attitudes and the need to be self-sufficient. One program director points out that, "People are not used to asking for help." In all, directors wrote that many small towns do not yet believe that a problem exists. The widely given response is, "We are okay."

Another rural program director pointed to the complex web of family and social relationships that would be affected by a client's decision to pursue literacy training. Changing your literacy skills means changing the perspective through which you view yourself and others. Rural people are especially sensitive to the social relationships they have built. The small size of the communities means that there isn't a broader population within which to build new relationships were existing relationships to be destroyed. "Perhaps people wonder and fear what will happen to their standing in their family and community if they increase their literacy level," adds this director.

In short, a variety of economic and cultural patterns make it difficult for literacy programs to reach those in need of help. Although it seems clear that the new economy will require increased skills, those opportunities are generally not yet available in many rural communities. Persistent poverty and economic distress make the future look bleak to many rural adults. A culture which values self-reliance and independence also makes it difficult for people to seek assistance. Finally, the integrated social networks common to small communities makes decisions to change far more risky than in larger communities.

**Approaches to Alleviating Limited Opportunity Structures.** Overcoming what are often deeply established economic and cultural patterns in a community is extraordinarily difficult. Rarely did directors report effective methods that address the heart of these economic and cultural barriers. More frequently, directors talked about approaches to recruiting and retaining clients.

In regions where there are few jobs, literacy program directors recruit clients by redefining why literacy is important. One director noted that his program stresses "motivations other than job readiness" such as personal independence, reading to children, participating in church and civic affairs, reading the local newspaper and the Bible, and reading for fun and information. This emphasis on obtaining personal satisfaction or developing the capacity to participate more fully in community activities offers more effective incentives to potential clients.

Without the incentive of a new job or family support, new literacy clients need tremendous support within the program. Once within a program, the "climate" surrounding instruction is important. One director believed that his

*Strategies which integrate literacy programs with broader self-help, development goals may be more appropriate.*

program's "only weapon is a caring staff, who make clients feel comfortable enough in class to overcome their fear of being found out and their sense of hopelessness." Instruction is often described as "very warm, sympathetic, and outgoing." Directors sought to understand their clients' needs and limitations in order to serve them in unorthodox ways "both day and night," "anyway possible." One director phrased this personalized effort by saying, "We try to keep the program local and caring."

If a literacy program is to succeed in retaining clients, they have to go beyond providing educational programs and listen carefully to the client's need for other supportive social services. Close interaction with other agencies helps the client identify and develop solutions to a whole host of family and personal problems.

Ultimately, solutions to rural illiteracy are embedded in solutions to the limited opportunity structure and persistent poverty found in many rural areas. Strategies which integrate literacy programs with broader self-help, development goals may be more appropriate. One example of this approach is the Ivanhoe Civic League in Ivanhoe, Virginia. The Ivanhoe Civic League supports a literacy program that is interwoven with family health programs, housing renovation projects, small business development assistance, and other services. Literacy classes are more like discussion groups. Some call them personal enhancement classes. Based on what they need and want to learn to support community development efforts, clients plan their own program. Driving a wedge into the community's cultural value of undereducation, counselors

work hard to help the clients stand up and say, "I am somebody." Clients are supported and encouraged to redefine themselves. This growth facilitates both individual and community empowerment.

In summary, limited opportunity structures offer a significant barrier to rural literacy providers. Integrating literacy programs with broader community development efforts is one approach to confronting illiteracy in rural areas. Minimally, the rural provider must find new motivators, develop a caring personalized approach, promote individualized attention, and link the client's need to solutions provided by other community social services.

## What Does All This Mean?

Although some rural practitioners have had experience in urban areas with which to compare rural practice, others have not. Comparisons may reveal more about the stereotypes rural people have of urban areas than about any real rural–urban differences. Still, the responses have a great deal to say about what practitioners view as the strengths and weaknesses of working in rural environments.

The character of rural communities is at once both a strength and a weakness. Rural program directors point to the smaller programs, more personal working relationships, ease of networking, and relaxed atmosphere as strengths. Clients have a strong work ethic and community members are willing to volunteer. The small size of a community, however, can be a disadvantage. What some see as caring and intimate, others find judgmental and stifling. Rural program directors acknowledge the challenges of protecting the privacy of clients. Ultimately, community attitudes toward education and the courage shown by those who confront their limited literacy skills play a critical role in the effectiveness of rural programs. In many respects, educating the community may be as important a task as providing direct assistance to clients.

*The economic distress felt in many rural communities and the persistent poverty found in still others present formidable barriers to literacy programs.*

Disadvantages focus a great deal on what rural communities often don't have—good transportation networks, an adequate funding base, or access to other literacy professionals. Distance and smaller populations combine to present formidable barriers to funding and supporting rural literacy programs. States can play a role in helping programs overcome some of these barriers. Funding strategies and policies which acknowledge the differences found in rural areas will help, as well as training programs developed in response to the isolation felt by rural practitioners.

Finally, the economic distress felt in many rural communities and the persistent poverty found in still others present formidable barriers to literacy programs. Workplace literacy programs often offer little help, given that the size of many rural manufacturing companies and businesses is small. Efforts to respond to literacy needs may need to be closely integrated with efforts to develop the community's economic base.

# Volunteers and Social Service Agencies

One feature of rural communities is the tightly woven social fabric that characterizes much of community life. People interact with one another frequently, see each other in multiple roles, and often make few distinctions between the community as a whole and its social institutions. Using volunteers and collaborating with other social service agencies are natural ways to integrate literacy programs into the social life of the community.

## Using Volunteer Staff

The broad survey of rural literacy programs showed that 87 percent of literacy program directors use volunteers, 12 percent don't use volunteers, and 1 percent gave no response. Of those who use volunteers, most say they do so to reduce client/teacher ratio. Volunteers serve primarily as tutors, although others serve as administrative or support staff. Extended telephone interviews with selected rural literacy programs offers a closer look at the many ways programs use the talents of community members. Table 19 offers an overview of what we learned.

### Working With Core Staff

Volunteer workers assist with core administrative and program functions in several ways—recruitment, training, coordinating, publicity, and fundraising.

**Recruitment Activities.** Recruiting clients and other tutors is a task often shared with volunteers. Volunteers knock on doors, talk to church groups and service clubs, staff booths at fairs and malls, produce television and radio spots, and build floats for parades. In one program, volunteers developed an ad for the local high school client handbook. The hope was that high school clients would encourage their parents (those without a high school diploma) to attend ABE/GED classes. In one community, volunteers helped with a march in which high school students went door-to-door to promote public relations and to recruit new students and tutors.

*Volunteers play a critical role in encouraging adults to enroll in the program, often the hardest step to take.*

In general, rural program directors tell us that volunteers contribute far more than another pair of hands. Volunteers bring ideas, a knowledge of resources available within the community, friendships with those who may need help, and an enthusiasm that helps overcome the inevitable frustrations that arise in rural programs. Directors point out that some of the most persuasive arguments for enrolling in literacy programs come from their volunteers—community members who know what the program can accomplish and who also understand the needs of their friends. Volunteers play a critical role in encouraging adults to enroll in the program, often the hardest step to take.

**Training Activities.** Volunteers also help with tutor training workshops. They make group presentations, direct all-day seminars, and put on tutor luncheons. Volunteers serve as resource people at tutor–client support group meetings and serve as trainers for English as a Second Language conversation clubs.

**General Coordination.** In addition to being involved in recruitment and training activities, volunteers often perform administrative tasks or coordinate activities within literacy programs. Program directors typically described tasks such as maintaining reading materials, helping in the office, or serving as key administrative staff. Interviews revealed a wide range of coordinating activities such as coordinating a jail program, an immigrant client service office which gives citizenship tests and provides information about community services, or a volunteer organization that selects and categorizes instructional materials. Other volunteers perform readability tests on adult library books and rewrite workplace materials at a lower reading level. In some programs, volunteers coordinate the entire range of clerical services from answering the phone to bookkeeping duties.

**Publicity Work.** Volunteers also contribute to the publicity efforts of rural literacy programs. Methods used to recruit additional volunteers are often inseparable from methods used to publicize the program—the two strategies work hand-in-hand. Publicity efforts in which volunteers are involved include: speaking to service clubs, maintaining publicity booths, publishing a newsletter, helping with program publicity, helping with social activities, and helping with fundraising activities. Volunteer staff also serve on advisory boards and literacy councils to help increase public awareness of their literacy program.

**Fundraising Activities.** Whether it be raising and selling straw flowers, distributing donation canisters, or coordinating a fundraising auction, volunteers are widely used for fundraising activities. One program director noted that she formed a volunteer committee to assist the literacy center's staff in developing fundraising strategies. The committee selected and went on to organizing a successful food tasting fair. Another program used volunteers to solicit in-kind materials for the center. Volunteers were able to supply the center with furniture, office supplies, and

student materials. The examples of volunteers assisting with fundraising activities are numerous. The message is simple—volunteers are essential, and they are an influential source for securing donations from the community.

### Working With Clients

Volunteers are active in helping clients as well as helping core staff. Volunteers interview prospective clients and tutors and develop appropriate client/tutor matches. Volunteers assist clients with pre-tests, follow-up tests, and inventory tests. In so doing, they free the tutor to assist clients with a variety of social needs such as family problems, financial problems, children's schooling, and abuse problems. Volunteers also drive literacy vans and serve as childcare providers.

As indicated in the survey, the most common use of volunteers is as tutors. Volunteers not only get involved in providing direct instruction to clients, but they also become the client's mentor, friend, and advocate.

**TABLE 12**
**Using Volunteer Staff**

Working For Core Staff
- Recruitment Activities

Training Activities

General Coordination
- Coordinating components of the literacy program
- Maintaining reading materials
- Helping in the office

Publicity Work of Volunteer Staff

Fundraising Activities

Working With Clients
- Testing and interviewing clients
- Providing transportation for clients
- Providing childcare for clients
- As Tutors

## Working With Social Service Agencies

Like the work of volunteers, social service agencies provide valuable assistance to rural literacy programs. Of the 700+ survey respondents, 85 percent said they work with social service agencies/providers; 13 percent replied they do not use social service agencies, while 2 percent gave no response. Rural adult literacy program directors coordinate their literacy programs with an extensive list of human service providers (see Appendix L). A sampling of the types of collaborative activities are described below.

Agencies, organizations, and businesses work with literacy program directors in recruiting tutors and by providing space, funding, transportation, childcare, and hot lines. Some examples of this cooperation are:

- social workers volunteer to be tutors,
- a state college pays the salaries of literacy program workers and provides office space, supplies, and equipment,
- a school's driver education students provide transportation for clients to get to literacy programs,
- a restaurant makes its banquet room available during the day as a tutoring site,
- a circuit court judge allows his chambers to be used for tutoring when court is not in session.

There seems to be no limit to the creative ways in which the community's organizations can be used in support of literacy efforts.

Literacy programs network with other social service agencies in a variety of ways, but one of the more interesting strategies seemed to be community councils. The structure of community councils vary from one community to the next, but a common feature is that community organizations meet once a month or so to share information on their programs, concerns about community problems, and professional development activities planned for the coming months. Sharing information in this way enables community organizations to better understand one another, share professional development resources, and develop integrated strategies in response to community problems. One program director keeps "a booklet listing all participating agencies, brief descriptions of services, contact persons, telephone numbers, and addresses" in order to link literacy clients with other services.

*If literacy issues can be addressed from within broader community problems, then individuals become part of a team working to resolve issues much bigger than the literacy needs of a single individual.*

Efforts to address community problems from multiple perspectives can be especially valuable to literacy programs. Many clients find it difficult to address literacy needs as an individual problem. If literacy issues can be addressed from

within broader community problems, then individuals become part of a team working to resolve issues much bigger than the literacy needs of a single individual. This seems to reduce some of the stigma associated with limited literacy skills and offers a larger framework within which clients can think about their need for literacy skills.

## What Does All This Mean?

The extensive list of services that volunteers contribute makes it obvious that they are an integral component of rural literacy programs. Without volunteers, many programs would be skeletal operations—capable of reaching a much smaller number of rural clients.

Program directors point out that volunteers are valuable but not "free." They generate hidden costs—costs associated with recruiting, training, and retaining. In addition, effective use of volunteers requires that literacy programs be very deliberate in sharing responsibility and achieving balance between paid staff and volunteer efforts. Past strategies to simply recruit and train as many volunteers as possible have not provided the stability needed in many rural literacy programs. Program directors argue that volunteers need to be incorporated into programs in a far more deliberate and comprehensive manner. Both involve costs—costs in terms of time and money.

Given the extent to which rural programs rely upon volunteers, state literacy directors and coalitions may want to explore strategies that assist local programs in recruiting, training, and integrating volunteer resources into programs. Rural program directors themselves express interest in training that will enable them to make better use of volunteers and lengthen their longevity with the program.

*Collaboration among community organizations is a natural part of literacy practice in rural areas.*

Finally, collaboration among community organizations is a natural part of literacy practice in rural areas. Creativity seems to know no bounds as communities find unique ways to use the limited resources they have in support of literacy programs. It is important to realize, however, that this collaboration has a far broader impact than simply sharing limited resources. Many adults need a broader context within which to address their literacy needs. A desire to read to their children, become eligible for a better-paying job, or contribute to community needs often offers a much more compelling reason for improving literacy skills than admitting failure in past educational programs. Collaboration with a wide range of community organizations increases the potential that literacy needs can be addressed within this broader context.

# Strategies and Approaches of Rural Literacy Programs

Our past research into educational practice in rural areas always led to models—programs which could, for the most part, be transferred to other rural settings. In exploring rural literacy practice, however, we found the concept of a model program much less useful. Although all literacy programs share common functions such as recruitment, tutor training, or raising funds, strategies for accomplishing these functions varied enormously. Given this diversity, we chose not to select and describe models of "best practice." Instead, we have tried to sprinkle the many effective strategies for organizing and managing rural literacy programs throughout earlier chapters.

Our survey of rural literacy practice has led us to conclude that literacy programs which are highly integrated with other services or tightly linked to community needs are the most stable. So we've selected several models that illustrate these "close connections." This chapter draws examples from school districts, community colleges, libraries, and community organizations. In addition, we have highlighted two delivery strategies: workplace and family literacy programs. We hope the sketches offer insight into the many ways in which literacy programs can be integrated into the community.

## School Districts

Rural school districts have, for many years, provided literacy training and adult basic education. Several of these programs have become increasingly collaborative over time, illustrating the creative ways in which rural literacy programs can take advantage of their limited resources. Programs in Ohio, Washington, and Georgia offer examples.

Founded in 1966, the Southern and Southwestern Ohio Adult Basic Education Program has initiated ABE programs in thirteen southern Ohio, rural Appalachian counties. Learning centers have been established in public schools, libraries, community agencies, vocational schools, universities, handicapped facilities, and industries.

These learning centers provide highly individualized, self-paced instructional programs designed to assist adults with the improvement of basic literacy and daily living skills. Instructional programs include GED preparation and academic improvement for higher education success and training.

The Southern and Southeastern Ohio Adult Basic Education Program has been commended for its client database, a system that documents the social and economic impact the program has had on the participants. The program uses a locally-designed client folder to record essential data related to client enrollment, client progress, attendance, goals, and personal achievements. Staff work consistently at gaining client feedback and other information related to evaluating the program's effectiveness. Periodic follow-up studies are conducted on former clients to explore job placement, further educational attainment, and other personal changes.

This information is included in an inexpensive, effective annual report which contains client data on enrollment, achievement, program cost-effectiveness, and positive outcomes. This year's report cites the following examples of positive outcomes: "31 clients gained new, full-time, or part-time employment. It is estimated that $1,128,976 additional income will result from this new employment." Another outcome reported, "The cost of instruction was approximately $169 per client." This simple report conveys the importance of literacy/adult education and its monetary implications.

*Former clients undergo intensive tutor training and thus contribute to program success and cost-effectiveness by becoming active volunteers.*

Another unique aspect of the Southern and Southeastern Ohio Adult Basic Education Program is that it uses former clients to provide instruction and related services for the program. Former clients undergo intensive tutor training and thus contribute to program success and cost-effectiveness by becoming active volunteers.

Early on, the program was recognized for using and training paraprofessionals in home instruction. The program's staff development activities assisted beginning ABE programs throughout the Appalachian region. In twenty-four years of service, the program has received numerous foreign visitors. In 1972, the program was recognized by UNESCO for worldwide contributions to literacy and in 1973 was identified by the International Reading Association as a model ABE program.

In the northeastern corner of Washington a partnership among school districts, libraries and a community-action agency has formed. This partnership, Read to Succeed, is located in Colville, Washington and serves a 5000-square-mile area that encompasses 13 school districts and six library systems. Instead of each agency offering literacy instruction on its own, they have joined forces. The Northeast Washington Rural Resource Development Association serves as the umbrella for Read to Succeed and administers funds provided by the State Department of Education's Library Literacy Grant. The partnership also receives funds from the Superintendent of Public

Instruction's Adult Tutor Coordination grant and ACTION's Literacy Program. Tutoring is conducted one-on-one in homes, empty school rooms, and the library. Resource materials are maintained in each of the six libraries. Close coordination of the key agencies makes excellent use of scarce literacy resources.

Another cooperative school district project in Elberton, Georgia brought together the local school system, the county juvenile court, and the National Guard. The Elbert County Adult Literacy Program linked with Literacy Volunteers of America to serve this northeast Georgia county.

For additional information, contact:

**Southern and Southeastern Ohio**
**Adult Basic Education**
23365 St. Rt. 124, P.O. Box 577
Piketon, OH 45661
Phone: (614) 289-4172
Director: Leon Bevins

**Read To Succeed**
320 N. Main
Colville, WA 99114
Phone: (509) 684-8421
Director: Colleen Hallam

**Elbert County Adult Literacy Program**
390 Mill St.
Elberton, GA 30635
Phone: (706) 283-8884
Directors: Connie Woods

## Community Colleges

Rural community colleges often provide the leadership, staff, and facilities for addressing illiteracy. Multi-campus sites and the presence of a trained remedial skills staff make community colleges a natural choice for literacy programs. Wallace State Community College illustrates the many strategies that can be used to reach rural clients, and Rend Lake College shows the sensitivity that many community college programs bring to their work with rural adults.

In 1986, a University of Alabama study found that adult illiteracy was the number one barrier to attracting new businesses into the area. Quotes from statistical reports pointed out that "the education level of adults 25 years or older stops at the elementary school," "unemployment

*Wallace State Community College illustrates the many strategies that can be used to reach rural clients.*

rates are 15 percent above the national average for the past 10 years," and "13.1 percent of adults are functioning at less than a fifth grade reading level." This high rate of illiteracy was hurting west central Alabama's economy and people.

Wallace State Community College's Adult Learning Center began to address this problem. This multifaceted ABE program serves two counties covering 1,694 square miles. Tutoring sites can be found at service stations, county jails, nursing and mental health facilities, nutrition offices, libraries, worksites, and union halls. This program goes where the people are.

For clients using the main learning center, transportation and childcare are provided. For home-bound clients, a cooperative effort of the Selma/Dallas County Library System, Adult Basic Education, and Wallace State Community College provides tutoring. A van furnished with carrels and adult literacy materials travels throughout the rural area. While the tutor works with the adult, the driver may read to children in the household. Another driver, a Catholic priest, takes the van and two other tutors to an outlying area one evening a week to teach reading. The literacy van delivers services twice-a-month to over eighty residents who read below the second-grade level.

In addition to the main learning center and van operations, the community college has two worksite locations. Companies provide space and literacy materials. They also encourage employee participation by linking literacy skills to job promotion. Consequently, literacy lessons often focus on job skills. For example, the companies provide work forms and office materials to assist in the training.

Approximately one-tenth of the clients who are working at the upper placement level cannot attend a tutoring class. These clients are served by a telephone program called "T by T" (Tutoring by Telephone). If learners fail to keep in touch, the staff calls them and encourages their continued participation.

ElWanda Penn, director of the Adult Learning Center, helps link the community college with the Selma community. Local Lutheran church women have developed a curriculum focused on building life skills which is used in addition to

Laubach reading materials. The Selma Baptist Association places money in its annual budget for the tutor recognition luncheon. Civic clubs provide t-shirts and tote bags for distribution to tutors. Sociology students from Wallace State Community College and Judson College, a private area college, serve as volunteer tutors while earning college credits.

Many community colleges are addressing the illiteracy problem. Community colleges reported success when they used client orientation meetings for personal goal setting and self-esteem building. Rend Lake College's Adult Literacy program surveyed retention rates of clients attending orientation and clients not attending orientation. Ninety percent of those who attend the orientation session remain in the program in contrast to a less than 50 per cent retention rate for clients not attending the orientation.

*Rend Lake College shows the sensitivity that many community college programs bring to their work with rural adults.*

For more information, contact:

**Wallace State Community College–Selma**
**Adult Learning Center**
P.O. Drawer 1049
Selma, AL 36702–1049
Phone: (205) 875-2634
Director: Dr. ElWanda Penn

**Rend Lake College Adult Literacy**
Route 1
Ina, IL 62846
Phone: (618) 437-5321, ext. 341
Director: Barbara Bauernfeind

## Libraries

Libraries, seen by small town residents as a safe place to learn, offer excellent homes for literacy projects. As one learner stated, "When seen approaching the library, my neighbors assume I am a reader entering the library for my next book." Libraries in California and Kentucky illustrate programs that provide direct service to clients. The Shawnee Library System demonstrates the resources a regional library system can provide in support of local literacy efforts.

California residents hear a daily televised message that says, "If you want to read, go to your library." This message means more than simply reminding people that libraries have good books. It is the slogan adopted by the California Library System to promote literacy assistance at library centers throughout California. The California Library Literacy Service Act and the Library Services and Construction Act are funding libraries to expand their literacy services.

*The Shawnee Library System demonstrates the resources a regional library system can provide in support of local literacy efforts.*

One of these sites, Del Norte Literacy Program, is located two storefronts away from the local library. Started by volunteer community members four years ago, this literacy program serves six small communities, the largest of which is Crescent City, California, population 5000.

This region was once a major fishing and timber area. The region has recently been designated a National Recreation Area, so the economic base has shifted to tourism. Competition for the few available jobs has made education increasingly valuable. With a staff of 2.5 people and 38 tutors, the Del Norte Literacy Program serves some 60 clients a year. The center is composed of five reading rooms, a client/tutor library, and lounge.

Literacy programs often use several approaches to personalize and make a curriculum meaningful for clients. One way Del Norte does this is to encourage writing contests. Prizes are awarded by the local grocery store. Another way the literacy program personalizes its program is for tutors at the center to host a poetry circle that annually publishes a poetry book. In addition to internally sponsored events, the area has a writing contest at its annual county fair called "Supporting Writing in the Country." The literacy program contributes $100 for prize money to the event.

Stressing client empowerment, Del Norte's one-on-one tutoring program addresses a client's literacy needs as well as daily living and survival skill needs. The center adapts lessons to match the personal goals and needs of the client. Each client has his/her own curriculum which is composed of skills he/she needs to practice. Duet reading is a frequent practice at Del Norte. The clients choose a book and then the tutor reads along with them. The book, which may be a

*Stressing client empowerment, Del Norte's one-on-one tutoring program addresses a client's literacy needs as well as daily living and survival skill needs.*

romance novel or murder mystery, is generally one or two levels above the client's reading level. This self selection of books allows a client to pursue personal interest reading topics with assistance from the paired tutor.

The program relies on the state television literacy slogan as one strategy for recruiting clients. The center also uses posters with tear-off promotional sheets to recruit clients. As in many rural communities, the power of "word of mouth" is strong. In addition, the library newsletter and the public library staff serve as major recruitment resources.

Tutor training and nurturing are important components at Del Norte. When enrolling in a training program, tutors are taken through exercises to help them discover how they themselves learn. They explore whether they are auditory or visual learners. This self-recognition helps tutors become more sensitive to the clients whose learning style may differ from their own and helps them adapt their teaching strategies to each individual client. A bimonthly breakfast allows tutors to exchange information and offer support to one another. These exchanges are important networking times and include special literacy speakers twice a year.

The director noted that not only did the literacy program serve to broaden self-confidence of the clients, but it also imparted and instilled new self-confidence in the tutors themselves. One tutor had recently started a business, one had obtained a patent, and one returned to school to finish a degree. As tutors feel better about themselves, this sense of success often transfers to the clients.

In addition to creative approaches to curriculum and methodologies, client recruitment efforts, and tutor training, Del Norte has a rather innovative idea about fundraising. The area recycling center donates a portion of their profit to the literacy program, and another business contributes one percent of its net earnings.

Reaching youth who desire employment, the elderly who desire to read for their own satisfaction, and the Hmong population who desire to speak English, this rural library literacy center displays a dedicated approach to serving the rural population of northern California.

Another practice common to library literacy programs is the use of bookmobiles. Some bookmobiles simply provide the tutor transportation to the learner's home, while other vans are equipped with learning carrels and state-of-the-art computer equipment. Grayson County Literacy Program, a Laubach volunteer program in Kentucky, began its literacy program in a corner of the library. Today, tutoring is conducted one-on-one or in small groups in the library, the firehouse, church, city hall, or from a bookmobile. Prior to the use of the tutoring van, the average client would need to travel twenty-four miles for tutoring. Now clients travel eight miles to the five van locations scattered throughout this central Kentucky county.

The Shawnee Library System, a well-developed regional library system in Carterville, Illinois, has established the Literacy Support Project. This project is designed to help local literacy projects with the type of support a regional library system can best provide—a ready supply of books for the new reader, overall publicity for client and tutor recruitment, and the opportunity for area-wide planning, coordination, and communication.

Program staff coordinate area-wide literacy planning, networking, and communication of literacy programs, whether sponsored by educational institutions, governmental agencies, or private organizations. Their publicity efforts include printing over 28,000 brochures each year, making over 200 literacy speeches, appearing on TV talk shows, staffing booths at malls, and designing and producing family literacy puppet shows.

The Literacy Support Project was established to help local literacy programs find literacy materials. The collection and distribution of materials are still major priorities of the project. This excellent collection of materials rotates among the tutoring sites, which include 43 libraries, jails, correctional facilities, hospitals, mental health facilities, and the area community colleges. Bibliography materials compiled include:

1) **Resource Bibliography for Literacy Workers**—853 listings were compiled for literacy directors and volunteer tutors. The publication summarizes literacy teaching resources available in the area libraries.

2) **Bibliography of the Literacy Support Project**—This bibliography lists over 3,500 titles which are appropriate for new, adult readers. The listings include reading levels.

3) **Subject "bibs"**—These four page theme pamphlets list new reader and low-level reading materials on designated subjects.

The Shawnee Library System has several other on-going literacy efforts. They provide "Druggists' Instruction Forms" for each pharmacy in the area to help pharmacists become aware of non-readers. Pharmacists have responded quite favorably to this program. They are also working extensively with parents of Head Start, Even Start, and kindergarten at-risk children. Programs and activities offered by Shawnee Library System include: parent libraries in each child's classroom, book collections created for home visitors to distribute while on home visits, parent–child reading workshops, and book bags containing a book and parent reading tips. Created by church and extension organizations, the book bags have shared approximately 10,000 used books with interested readers. For more information, contact:

**Del Norte Literacy Program**
104 Mason Mall
Crescent City, CA 95531
Phone: (707) 464-7441
Director: Mary Smith

**Grayson County Literacy Council**
121 S. Heyser Dr.
Leitchfield, KY 42754
Phone: (502) 259-9038
Director: Marjorie Woodard

**Literacy Support Project**
Shawnee Library System
Greenbriar Rd.
Carterville, IL 62918
Phone: (618) 985-3711
Director: Betty Neely

## Community Organizations

Literacy programs operated by community-based organizations, volunteer associations, or local coalitions often link literacy programs with broader economic or community development goals. In so doing, they integrate literacy skills into the long-term goals of clients and communities alike. Programs in Virginia, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and Delaware illustrate the ways in which community organizations can become involved.

Rural economic development organizations recognize that to achieve their economic development goals, they must take an active part in raising the educational level of area citizens. An active community based organization that exemplifies this philosophy is the Ivanhoe Civic League founded in 1986. An Ivanhoe Civic League member stated, "We have come to understand that education is the most valuable program we can administer."

Located in southwestern Virginia, the town of Ivanhoe lies on the boundary between two counties. The citizens of Ivanhoe feel that they have been historically underserved by the local public school system, with a larger portion of the country resources supporting schools in the two county seats. This lower allocation of resources, coupled with

*In Ivanhoe, literacy programs are not isolated educational programs but are integrated into a broader strategy of community development.*

economic hardship and a traditional de-emphasis on formal education, has contributed to a large number of illiterate individuals. The high school dropout rate is an alarming 75 percent. Literacy and GED programs are essential programs for the community.

In Ivanhoe, literacy programs are not isolated educational programs but are integrated into a broader strategy of community development. This integrated approach to education and community development is described in the mission statement for the Ivanhoe Civic League.

In Ivanhoe, the learning of skills and methodologies has always been part and parcel of the struggle to liberate the consciousness of the individual and to elevate the community as a whole. For every "skill" lesson taught in Ivanhoe, there is another that seeks to facilitate the application of skills to the needs that people have. For every formal seminar there is a constant emphasis on the empowerment of individual and community. For every GED and college class there are community celebrations of history, culture, and language that build awareness and pride of the past and hope for the future.

Clients plan their own instruction based on their needs and interests. The classes are informal and developmental with encouragement provided by the teachers. In accordance with the empowerment philosophy of the program, the participants are inherently involved in the administrative and decision-making process of the education program.

Ivanhoe Civic League is now the largest employer in town. In addition to their literacy emphasis, they provide family health outreach, a housing renovation project, small-business development assistance, a community library, a children's summer recreation program, and a summer youth work program.

Leading the Ivanhoe Civic League is Maxine Waller, a recent recipient of the Achievement Against Odds Award from the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

Having recently completed her GED, she is very aware of the learner's struggles and efforts and applies this awareness to the philosophy and structure of the educational program.

Another community-based literacy project in Greenfield, Massachusetts, the Literacy Center, encourages personal development and personal control of learning. The director, Phil Rabinowitz, notes that once clients realize that they can be in control of their learning, they learn they can control other things in their life. The teachers, administrators, and clients function as a community of learners. They work as a group to solve problems and to plan long-range goals. The instruction is offered in group settings with individual strategy lessons developed for each client. As Dr. Rabinowitz points out in a phone interview,

Working in groups rather than one-on-one serves to demystify adult literacy instruction. Needing instruction is not a shameful thing, but rather admitting that you need instruction is a courageous thing. Hiding in a corner of a library does not give the message of being courageous. Clients need the support of a community. The program's retention rate is 80 percent, and I believe that this is due in part to the fact that clients get together to talk and to discuss in groups. This is more important than academics. The notion of respecting one's own opinion and the opinion of others is new to some clients. Another reason I don't support one-on-one tutoring is that when an accomplishment has been made in such an arrangement, the accomplishment usually belongs to the tutor. This is to say, the client thinks, "I couldn't have done this without you," whereas in the group situation, the accomplishment belongs to everyone. As teachers and as administrators, we try to convey to the clients that we too are struggling for more control in our lives.

*Once clients realize that they can be in control of their learning, they learn they can control other things in their life.*

Founded in 1985 as an Adult Basic Education and GED training clinic, the Literacy Center serves three counties and is the largest reading program in western Massachusetts. The program charges a sliding scale fee per week of instruction. This past year over 200 clients were served.

In Rolling Fork, Mississippi, the Sharkey–Issaquena Community Challenge, Inc. grew out of efforts originally housed in a funeral home. This community program has grown to include a family-oriented literacy program, a workplace literacy program, a drop-out prevention program, an Education for Employment Program, a child abuse prevention program, an alcohol and drug abuse prevention program, and a gang prevention program.

In Milton, Delaware, Casa San Francisco was started by the collaborative effort of the local United Way, Catholic Social Services, and the Catholic diocese. Located in a 100-year-old house, Casa San Francisco is a small, multifaceted organization that serves the poor in Milton and surrounding communities. In addition to providing a literacy program, they have a 12-bed homeless shelter, a hot-meal program for senior citizens, child/parenting classes, a food-distribution program, and a crisis-help center.

For more information, contact:

**Ivanhoe Civic League Inc.**
P.O. Box 201
Ivanhoe, VA 24350
Phone: (703) 699-1383
Executive Director: Maxine Waller

**The Literacy Project**
13 Newell Court
Greenfield, MA 01301
Phone: (413) 774-3935
Executive Director: Phil Rabinowitz

**Sharkey–Issaquena Com[illegible]y Challenge, Inc.**
P.O. Box 142
Rolling Fo[illegible]
Phone: [illegible]
Executiv[illegible]ector: Annie Brown

CLOSED

**ABE/GED**
Casa San Francisco
127 Broad St. P.O. Box 38
Milton, DE 19968
Phone: (302) 684-8694
Director: Marion Bau

## Workplace Literacy

Interest in workplace literacy has gained its momentum from two publics—local employers and local literacy providers. Local employers recognize that the demands of the changing workplace are requiring a higher level of skills and that it is less expensive to retrain current employees in basic skills than it is to hire a new workforce. Literacy centers see the need to improve the literacy skills of their

population and recognize the importance of having literacy services incorporated directly into the workplace environment. An example of one such program in rural areas lies in South Carolina.

Over the past 18 years, a local non-profit organization, Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry, has met the challenge of building and upgrading the skills of the adults in the Hilton Head Area of South Carolina. Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry is a non-profit organization funded primarily by the United Way of Beaufort County, the Beaufort County School District's Adult Education Program, and private donations from groups and individuals. This program assists adults in refining basic home and workplace skills—skills such as reading a bus schedule or newspaper article, following directions on a map, comprehending the information on a pay-check stub, or balancing a checkbook. Although this model might appear to be more urban based, it affects hundreds of rural workers who must travel long distances to seasonal tourism employment. These rural workers would not be participating in literacy programs without the availability of on-site instruction in an urban area.

Approximately one person in five living in Beaufort County is functionally illiterate. To address this need, the program established offices in Beaufort, Hilton Head Island, and satellite centers throughout the Lowcountry. The program offers five different tutoring programs: workplace literacy, family literacy, English as a Second Language, the Beaufort County Detention Center, and TAPS (Tutoring Adults in a Private Setting). The workplace literacy is the focus of this review.

Some 7,000 rural people commute on a daily basis to Hilton Head Island, a seaside resort area. Due to the bus schedule, many workers ride a bus for over two hours and arrive an hour before work. Taking advantage of this early morning arrival, Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry contracted with hotel management to provide literacy training. The participation of hotel management in designing the training program at these resorts is a major reason for their success.

Hotels offer space for literacy programs. At the Marriott Hotel, literacy classroom facilities vary daily depending on hotel conference bookings. Literacy materials are kept on rolling carts for ease in relocating. Learners receive pay for attending the literacy class. At the Westin Hotel, an enclosed bar is the site for early morning sessions. Computers are carted in and used for the literacy programs. The hotel golf course maintenance shed also provides classroom space for literacy training. The program director reported, "The mowers stop at 3 p.m. and work on literacy begins." Other workplace literacy sites include the highway department, a local beer and wine distribution center, and various company personnel offices. Many of these offices make literacy participation a condition of employment for low reading level employees.

Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry provides each worksite with a coordinator–liaison and certified volunteer teachers for one-on-one or one-on-two individualized instruction. The agency works hard to make instruction relevant. For example, a person employed in the banquet division of the hotel who was accustomed to receiving verbal orders from previous supervisors was suddenly faced with a new supervisor who relayed orders in writing. The employee was forced to familiarize herself with written instructions in order to keep her job. The literacy program used her written orders as part of her instruction, increasing her reading skills in just a few weeks. The literacy program helped another employee recognize the written name of flowers so he could complete order forms for requests. The literacy center's philosophy is that whatever the client learns should have on-the-job relevance. Once clients see the usefulness and relevance of the learning, they are willing to accept literacy education and eventually expand personal education goals.

Tourism has its down cycles. Temporarily unemployed workers return to their rural communities during winter months. To accommodate this change, Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry reestablishes literacy sites throughout the countryside to provide learning continuity and client retention.

Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry receives funding from three sources: 1) the state Accommodations' Tax, charged to thousands of hotel guests; 2) profits made by the Island's big sporting events; and 3) the local utility company's program which allows customers to round up their bill giving the difference to local charitable programs.

For more information, contact:

**Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry**
P.O. Box 21118
Hilton Head Island, SC 29925
Phone: (803) 681-6655
Executive Director: Rebecca Morris

## Family Literacy

Children and parents learning together has become recognized as a very effective literacy approach. Attempting to break the cycle of undereducation, literacy providers are increasing their offerings to include family literacy. The National Center for Family Literacy has defined family literacy as "shared learning, reading, and writing experiences that improve the educational environment of the family and strengthen the support for learning in the home" (Potts, 1991). Programs in New York and New Jersey illustrate rural adaptations of this approach.

Located in eastern upstate New York, Rensselaer County, once a thriving dairy area, is now struggling to maintain its communities' vitality. Housed in a renovated liquor store, Literacy Volunteers of America Eastern Rensselaer County has one paid staff member and relies on volunteers to provide one-on-one client instruction for its forty-two clients.

What is worth noting about Rensselaer is its emphasis on family literacy. The work in family literacy began when Upper Hudson Literacy System and three local affiliates of LVA, which included Eastern Rensselaer, embarked upon a cooperative project to encourage family reading among "at-risk" parent groups. The project, entitled "Family Reading Circle," developed a set of outlines for ten weekly sessions and initiated a full-fledged publicity campaign.

Despite this well-publicized effort, no parents attended the program's initial meeting. Undaunted, the literacy director, Bea Peterson, chose a new approach to engage parents in literacy programs. Bea became a companion to the Head Start's home visitor staff and joined the staff on their weekly rounds. Today, the family literacy coordinator visits the home, reads stories with the parent and children, discusses helpful hints on parenting, and emphasizes the importance of reading in the home. When possible, Bea discusses the availability of the literacy program at the center.

Head Start families are encouraged to attend the literacy center and pass the word to friends. Negotiations are currently underway to provide office space at the literacy center for the Head Start home visitor, thereby linking Head Start families with services available at the literacy center.

Looking for other ways to promote family literacy, Bea found the area health department's Well Baby Clinic to be a receptive collaborator. On scheduled monthly visits to health clinics, Bea models reading to the children while the parents watch. Each child is given a book to keep while the parent is given a book marker that lists reading tips.

The Eastern Rensselaer County Literacy Program works with the area health agencies in additional ways. They conduct in-service workshops for trainers of home health care workers, informing them of the literacy programs available. Because of this effort, home health trainers no longer need to reject low-skilled applicants from the program. They simply refer the home health worker to the literacy center as an intermediate step. In addition, they coordinate a semi-annual health fair with the health council.

The literacy booth and story corner are in prominent locations at the health fair and attract many casual observers, offering an appropriate way to connect healthy active minds with healthy bodies. Another way the literacy program works with the health agencies is that they play an active role in developing an area health and human resource directory which benefits both social service health agencies and their respective clients.

The literacy program extends its family literacy efforts into the workplace. The director has developed a thirty-minute program on the importance of reading to kids. During lunch, each worker can view the tape and receive a book as well as a list of reading tips. In addition to identifying new clients and demonstrating effective reading practices in the home, this workplace effort helps business owners see the return on the yearly contribution they make to the literacy project.

*The LVA of Cape May County, New Jersey sends literacy volunteers to the local hospital's Healthy Start Program.*

Similar in practice to LVA–Eastern Rensselaer County, the LVA of Cape May County, New Jersey sends literacy volunteers to the local hospital's Healthy Start Program. Over 600 women have been introduced to a literacy program that stresses the importance of reading to their children.

For more information, contact:

**Literacy Volunteers of America**
**Eastern Rensselaer County**
South Main St., Box 8
Berlin, NY 12022
Phone: (518) 658-3000
Director: Bea Peterson

**Literacy Volunteers of America**
**Cape May County**
302 Knox Ave.
Cape May Point, NJ 08212
Phone: (609) 884-3487
Director: Peggy Myers

## What Does All This Mean?

Scattered throughout our nation's rural areas, diverse literacy centers work to meet the needs of illiterate adults. Some rural literacy programs are part of the formal educational system, while others rely on well-organized grassroot efforts. Some have found ways to garner adequate resources, while others rely on discarded school books.

*Diversity is clearly a feature of rural practice.*

Some have mobile services reaching all communities in their service area, while others operate at a single site. Some work out of newly furnished centers in their community colleges, and others operate out of abandoned storefronts. Some manage to follow rural workers to the workplace; others concentrate on daytime literacy center operations. Diversity is clearly a feature of rural practice.

We found rural literacy programs initiated by a wide variety of agencies. We suspect, if not believe, that the reason for this diversity lies in the diversity of rural communities themselves. Differences among rural communities means that literacy programs are often initiated by different organizations. Strategies to overcome barriers—distance, lack of childcare, or isolation—depend on resources available locally. Consequently, rural programs solve these problems differently.

If states want to serve rural adults, they must support and sustain this diversity. State funding efforts should not focus too narrowly on one provider or provide resources only to conventional providers—schools or community colleges.

Moreover, states need to support networking efforts among rural programs. Rural literacy center directors have many resourceful ideas to share. Whether it be the latest successful fundraiser or a new recruitment tool, a variety of strategies are valuable to literacy program directors struggling to match available resources with effective strategies. State literacy organizations, corporations, and funding agencies who have interest in supporting rural literacy might consider supporting strategies that encourage information exchange across rural literacy providers.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

In this report we have tried to paint a portrait of literacy practice in rural areas. In so doing, we hope to put rural practitioners in touch with one another and with the many strategies for responding to the challenges posed by rural environments. Those who contributed to this report were unanimous in their call for increased opportunities to network and share information with other rural practitioners.

We also hope to offer policy makers and program directors a clearer sense of the character of illiteracy in rural areas and the current status of rural programs. One of the real dilemmas facing rural practice is the extent to which policies and initiatives are framed from an urban perspective. This is not to argue that rural needs are more pressing than urban ones or that we ought to frame policy from a rural rather than urban perspective. The reality is that policy makers and program directors start from what they are familiar with—the cities and suburban areas in which most live. We hope that this report helps deepen the understanding and broaden the perspective from which these individuals can think about their efforts to address the pressing issues of illiteracy.

We close with a series of conclusions and recommendations drawn from the information collected and the deliberations of the project's advisory committee. The conclusions explore, in turn, the character of the illiteracy problem in rural areas, the status of rural practice, the extent to which current efforts to address illiteracy at the national and state level are likely to positively influence efforts at the local level, and the informational needs of rural literacy practitioners. The recommendations reflect our best estimates of next steps—directions in which both local and national literacy efforts should move in order to better respond to rural needs.

## Character of Rural Illiteracy

A careful look at estimates of illiteracy in rural areas suggests that the problem has several dimensions. Concerns with rural illiteracy at lower-level skills are not universal. States differ in the extent to which rural rates of illiteracy exceed urban ones by large enough margins to warrant increased attention to rural needs. Those states with substantial concerns are those that have historically faced problems with insuring adequate schooling or states which have large numbers of minority populations. The solutions are clearly different, depending on whether the state is trying to strengthen the base for adequate schooling, empower minority populations who have historically remained disadvantaged by our current educational system, or respond to the pressing needs of recent immigrants. Rural populations include all three. It would seem that in these states, being rural adds yet additional barriers to populations already disadvantaged by virtue of other circumstances.

It is at higher-level skills, defined here in terms of high school completion, that rural rates of illiteracy begin to exceed urban ones nearly universally. These differences remain pronounced among younger people, suggesting that their effects will continue to plague efforts at rural development. These differences are substantial enough to place yet another generation of rural people at-risk—limiting them to low paying manufacturing and service industry jobs.

## Status of Rural Practice

States have made substantial efforts to reach rural populations and rural communities have responded to the call for local initiative in eliminating illiteracy. Despite these efforts, most rural literacy programs remain fragile—dependent on the dedication and energy of relatively few people. Programs are underfunded, understaffed, isolated, and ill-equipped to deal with the range of learning problems and needs their clients bring. These circumstances make it difficult, if not impossible, for programs to engage in the long-range planning and capacity building needed to develop stability.

For the most part, rural literacy programs remain more aligned with formal education than with nonformal or community-based efforts. Although these programs show extraordinary creativity in stretching limited resources and adapting to the logistical barriers posed by rural environments, few exploit strategies that build on local culture and empower local people. In that sense, rural literacy programs have generally not been integrated into efforts to strengthen or revitalize the communities of which they are a part.

## Impact of Statewide and National Efforts

National efforts to focus attention on and allocate resources to literacy programs have had mixed results in rural areas. Most programs reported that the media attention focused on illiteracy was important. Others were pushed along too quickly—training a cadre of volunteer tutors only to find no one willing to step forward for assistance. The slower pace and lack of anonymity often found in rural communities favor quieter, more sustained efforts to develop community awareness of illiteracy and its impact. Efforts to increase statewide capacity to support literacy programs have been

important, however. They appear to have encouraged the development of literacy programs in rural areas and created the networks that are often vital to rural practice.

More recent efforts have focused on addressing illiteracy through other social problems—workforce needs, homelessness, welfare, the need for children to enter school better prepared to learn, etc. Such a strategy is likely to have limited impact in rural areas. Although rural communities share many of these problems, the context in which they are defined is quite different. Many rural communities, for example, need to create jobs rather than help community members develop skills for existing jobs. Studies of poverty suggest that rural communities deal with problems of transiency far more often than homelessness. As long as the social problems are defined from an urban context, rural areas will find current efforts to expand literacy services to be of limited value.

## Needs of Rural Practitioners

Clearly, rural program directors would argue that they need more of everything—money being at the top of the list. Certainly, states and other funding agencies need to acknowledge the disproportionate costs associated with practice in rural areas. Policies that allow reimbursement for travel costs, for example, are critical.

Perhaps the largest single need in rural literacy programs is access to information and training. Rural program directors need opportunities to share strategies. Information needs to be grounded in effective practice, but it also needs to be as diverse as possible. What doesn't work in one community may work in another, and vice versa. Rural program directors also need access to a wide range of assistance—advice on establishing client-centered programs, integrating literacy into efforts to address broader community needs, introducing family literacy components, etc. Rural literacy programs will often be the one-stop shop for those in need of services, so program directors need wide training and access to technical assistance. Regional centers or consortia of rural programs may offer structures through which information and technical assistance can be shared.

## Recommendations: National Level

**Recommendation 1: Rural Context**
Funding agencies need to develop formal strategies for inviting a rural response to funding initiatives. Program initiatives and policies need to be examined in terms of the needs of rural programs and the social problems faced by rural communities.

**Recommendation 2: Networking Support**
Efforts need to be made at the national level to provide a formal networking structure to support rural practice. A newsletter distributed nationally or a series of occasional publications developed in collaboration with rural program directors offer examples of useful strategies.

**Recommendation 3: More Integrated Strategies**
Rural programs are in need of examples that link literacy efforts with community development, social needs, or empowerment of minority populations. Funding targeted on the development of such strategies could help build examples helpful to other rural literacy programs.

## Recommendations: State Level

**Recommendation 4: Target Higher-Level Skills**
States must work with rural communities to deal with the limited opportunity structures that block economic development and contribute to low aspirations in education. Literacy programs must be supported to offer assistance at higher-skill levels as well as in basic reading and writing.

**Recommendation 5: Equitable Funding**
States need to develop funding strategies that compensate rural programs for the disproportionate costs associated with rural practice.

**Recommendation 6: Diverse Approaches**
States need to support rural literacy programs offered through nonformal as well as formal educational structures. Current rural programs need to be encouraged to adapt strategies found helpful in urban areas. In short, states need to encourage and support diversity among rural literacy programs.

**Recommendation 7: Encourage Collaboration**
The integrated social structure and limited resources of rural communities makes it more natural for issues such as literacy to be addressed in collaboration with other social needs. States need to develop policies and programs that enable social services to work collaboratively with literacy programs.

**Recommendation 8: Technical Assistance**
States need to develop and support regional centers capable of facilitating communication among rural programs and providing technical assistance across the entire range of issues important to maintaining stable programs.

**Recommendation 9: Persistently Poor Communities**
States need to work with local community leaders in developing and supporting literacy programs, especially family literacy programs. Poverty coupled with the limited resources typically available in rural communities make it unrealistic to expect such programs to rely on local funds.

## Recommendations: Local Level

**Recommendation 10: Client-Centered Focus**
Local programs need to develop a stronger client-centered focus, engaging current and former students in all aspects of the program.

**Recommendation 11: Build on the Local Culture**
Local programs need to integrate materials that celebrate the local culture as well as introduce clients to other cultures. Local programs need to take better advantage of strategies that create reading materials of interest to the local community.

**Recommendation 12: Form Collaborative Networks**
Local programs need to form consortia or collaborative networks that enable them to share resources, pursue funding opportunities, exchange materials, and in other ways spread costs over a larger client base.

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# Appendix A

## Literacy Advisory Council

**Jack Newell**
Director of Gadsen-Wakulla Even Start Project
Leon County Public Library
200 West Park Avenue
Tallahassee, FL 32301

**Miguel Ortega**
Interim Dean of Students
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**Sandra Robinson**
State Director for Adult Education
Department of Education
Montpelier, VT 05602-2703

**Vikki Jo Stewart**
Kansas State Library Literacy Program Director
P.O. Box 87
Andover, KS 67002

# Appendix B

## Survey of Rural Literacy Programs

Program Name: _____ Phone: (____)_____

Address: _____ Affiliation: _____

_____ (LVA, Laubach, School District, College, etc.)

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Program Director: _____ Region Served: _____
(State, County, Local)

Paid staff members: Full-time ____ Part-time ____

Volunteer staff: Full-time ____ Part-time ____

**Program/General Information:**

1. Describe your program (attach any brochures or newspaper articles that describe your program).

2. Which type of instruction do you offer?

   ____ individual tutoring
   ____ computer assisted instruction
   ____ small group (size ____)
   ____ large group (size ____)
   ____ radio/tv-telephone hook-up
   ____ tutor/instructor travels to client
   ____ client travels to the center
   ____ other (please describe below)

3. How does your program obtain funds?

   ____ ABE (Federal/State)
   ____ foundations/grants
   ____ tuition
   ____ local corporations/businesses
   ____ state funding (supplement to ABE)
   ____ other (please describe below)

4. Do you provide childcare? Yes____ No____

   If "Yes," does the childcare provide learning experiences for the children? Yes____ No____

   If "Yes," please explain (what experiences, who teaches them, etc.).

5. Do you provide transportation for clients? Yes____ No____

**Student/Client:**

6. How many clients did your program serve in 1988? _____

7. Do you have a waiting list of clients? Yes____ No____

   If yes, please explain why there is a waiting list and how long it is.

8. How do you recruit your students—check all that apply and circle the most significant.

___ "word of mouth" referrals
___ media advertising—radio/tv/newspaper
___ through civic/church organizations
___ referred by employer
___ referred by welfare/social service agency
___ referred by corrections/law enforcement
___ other (please describe below)

9. How would you describe most of your students? (Check one in each column.)

___ young adult (16–25)
___ mature adult (25–50)
___ older adult (50+)
___ less than 4th grade education
___ 4th to 8th grade education
___ some high school education
___ high school graduate

10. What percent of your clients/students leave your program without completing it? ____

How do you define "completion"?

11. What would you estimate is the most common reason clients/students leave without completing your program? Rank the top five reasons, with "1" being the most common and "5" the least common.*

___ moved
___ childcare problem
___ transportation problems
___ lack of motivation
___ personal problems
___ illness/health (self or family)
___ personal skills to low for program
___ access to program—distance/location of services
___ got a job
___ program did not meet their needs
___ client sent to/released from institution
___ lack of success in the program
___ needed more individualized help
___ client met personal goals
___ other (please describe below)

*Question adapted from Literacy Needs Assessment, Carole S. Talan, Altrusa International Foundation, Inc.)

**Use of Volunteers:**

12. Do you use volunteers in your program? Yes ___ No ___

13. If you use volunteers, how do you recruit them?

___ "word of mouth"
___ media—public service announcements
___ other—please explain

**Response to Rural Environment:**

14. Are you working with other social service agencies/providers? Yes____ No____

    If "Yes," describe with whom/and how you are working together.

15. Do any of your activities bring parents and their children together in an effort to improve literacy skills? Yes____ No____

    If "Yes," please describe the activity.

16. How does being rural make your job easier? What are the positive features of operating in a rural area?

17. How does being rural make your job harder? What helps you overcome the obstacles?

18. What role or function do you see for your program in 5 years? in 10 years?

# Appendix C

## Telephone Interview Protocol

1. Name of program.

2. Location of program.

3. Description of region where the program is located:

   a. Approximate square miles of program service area.

   b. Geography of the area.

   c. Are there little towns or a sparse population?

   d. What is the longest distance a student travels to get to your program?

   e. Does weather affect your program?

4. Regional description of economy:

   a. Is the economy improving, declining, or stable?

   b. What do people do there for a living?

   c. Is the economy in a state of transition?

   d. If people that come to the literacy program increase their skills and want a job or a better job, can they find it in the area, or do they need to leave? Where do they go, if they leave?

5. Estimate the extent of the illiteracy problem in your area:

   a. Percent of adults who are considered functionally illiterate.

   b. Local high school dropout rate.

   c. What message do parents give their children about staying in school?

6. Please describe your program.

7. Please provide a brief history of your program.

8. What materials are used to teach your students to read, write, and complete math?

   a. Do your students write little stories about their life experiences, recipes, or make family albums?

9. How does your program use volunteers?

10. How do you recruit tutors and students?

11. What have you found that doesn't (or wouldn't) work in your area as far as recruitment, retention or instruction of adults?

12. Have you encountered this problem, when spouses, friends or neighbors attend a literacy program return home, the person at home says, "If you go to that program, don't bother coming home." If so, how do you handle this situation?

13. Do you have any novel ways of fundraising? (Describe)

14. With what other community organizations do you network? How?

15. Your programs reaches what type of people. (percent males, females, white, black, ESL, displaced homemakers, dislocated workers, unemployed, publicly assisted, age category, etc.)?

16. What barriers do your students face in coming to the program?

17. Why do your students seek help?

18. How do you think a family literacy program would work in your area? What are your feelings about the idea of family literacy efforts?

19. How do you think a workplace literacy program would work in your area? What are your feelings about the idea of workplace literacy efforts?

20. If you could speak to rural adult literacy program directors from all over the country, what would you like to discuss with them?

# Appendix D

## List of Rural Literacy Programs Interviewed

**Alabama**
- Literacy Volunteers of Anniston & Calhoun County, Anniston
- Barbour County Literacy Association, Eufaula
- EBA Literacy Missions, Gadsden
- South Baldwin Literacy Council, Foley
- Northeast Alabama Area Adult Education Program, Fort Payne
- North Central Alabama Adult Basic Education Program, Hanceville
- Wallace Community College-Selma, Selma
- ECLIP (Elmore County Literacy Identification Project), Wetumpka

**Alaska**
- Kotzebue Regional Adult Education Program, Kotzebue

**Arizona**
- Victory, Chino Valley
- Douglas Literacy Program, Douglas
- Gila County GED/ESL, Globe

**Arkansas**
- Ouachita-Calhoun County Literacy Council, Hampton
- Foothills Vo-Tech Adult Education Program, Searcy
- Literacy Council of Arkansas County, Stuttgart
- Madison County Literacy Council, Wesley

**California**
- Del Norte Literacy Program, Crescent City
- Gridley Literacy Center, Gridley

**Colorado**
- Mesa County Public Library Adult Reading Program (McLARP), Grand Junction
- East Central BOCES, Limon

**Connecticut**
- Literacy Volunteers of America Northwest Connecticut Affiliate, Litchfield

**Delaware**
- Indian River School District ABE, Millsboro
- ABE/GED Casa San Francisco, Milton

**Florida**
- Sumter County Adult/Community Education, Bushnell
- Literacy Volunteers of Wakulla County, Inc., Crawfordville
- Columbia County Adult Program, Lake City
- Santa Rosa Literacy Volunteers, Milton
- St. Johns River Community College Adult Education Department, Palatka
- Wakulla Adult and Community Education, St. Marks

**Georgia**
- Elbert County Adult Literacy Program, Elberton

**Idaho**
- Adult Basic Education, Coeur d'Alene

**Illinois**
- Waubonsee's Adult Volunteer Literacy Program, Aurora
- Project READ, Belleville
- Shawnee Library System, Carterville
- "Readers Route" Literacy Project, Danville
- Literacy Initiative Volunteers, Harrisburg
- Rend Lake College Adult Literacy, Ina
- Literacy is for Everyone (LIFE), Moline
- Literacy Volunteers of West Central Illinois, Quincy
- Library Services to Literacy, Rockford

**Indiana**
- Boonville–Warrick County Public Library, Boonville
- LEARN-AT-HOME, Muncie
- Park Adult Tutoring Service, Rockville

**Iowa**
- Adult Basic Education, Creston

**Kansas**
- Happy Hearts, Inc./Learning Center, Atchison
- Adult Basic Education, El Dorado
- Saint Mary College Outfront, Leavenworth
- Adult Education Center, Ottawa
- Adult Education Center, Paola
- Pratt Area Literacy Volunteers of America, Pratt

**Kentucky**
- Grayson County Literacy Program, Leitchfield
- School on Wheels, Monticello
- Parent and Child Education (PACE), Morgantown
- Woodford County Literacy Program, Versailles

**Louisiana**
PEPI (Plantation Education Program, Inc.), New Iberia
Literacy Council of Winn Parish, Winnfield

**Maine**
Swan's Island Adult and Community Education, Atlantic
Belfast Adult Education, Belfast
North Haven Adult and Community Education, North Haven
Waterville Adult Community Education, Waterville

**Maryland**
Adult Education—ABE/GED/ESOL, Frederick

**Massachusetts**
The Literacy Project, Greenfield

**Michigan**
Retired Senior Volunteer Program's Literacy Project, Gaylord
Macomb Literacy Project, Mt. Clemens
Adult Literacy Council, Niles
North Menominee County Community Schools, Powers

**Minnesota**
East Central Minnesota Literacy Program, Cambridge
Adult Basic Education, Cass Lake
Wadena Literacy Project, Wadena

**Mississippi**
Amory Municipal Library Adult Literacy Program, Amory
Jackson County Literacy Council, Gautier
Mississippi Delta Community College, Moorhead
ABE/GED Hancock County, Pass Christian
Sharkey–Issaquena Community Challenge, Rolling Fork
Northwest Mississippi Community College, Senatobia

**Missouri**
STRIDE, Neosho
Waynesville Area Vocational School, Waynesville

**Montana**
Butte Literacy Program, Butte
Volunteers for Adult Literacy (VAL), Pablo

**Nebraska**
Alliance Literacy Council, Alliance
Mid-Plains Community College Area Adult Basic Education, North Platte
Adult Basic Education, Scottsbluff

**Nevada**
Reading Center of North Tahoe, Incline Village

**New Hampshire**
Adult Education–Community Action, Plymouth
Sullivan County Adult Tutorial Program, Newport

**New Jersey**
Literacy Volunteers of America—Cape May County, Cape May Point

**New Mexico**
LVA of Cibola County, Grants

**New York**
Literacy Volunteers—Allegany County, Belmont
Literacy Volunteers of America Eastern Rensselaer County, Berlin
GRASP Home Study Program, Hudson Falls

**North Carolina**
Parent and Child Together (PACT), Laurinburg

**North Dakota**
Dunseith Public School, Dunseith

**Ohio**
Northwest A.B.E., McDermott
Pike County JVS—Southeastern Ohio ABE, Piketon
Gallia Jackson Vinton Joint Vocational School District, Rio Grande

**Oklahoma**
Anadarko Adult Institute, Anadarko
Push for Literacy, Antlers
"Oklahoma . . . Do you READ me?", Oklahoma City

**Oregon**
Linn Benton Community College Adult Basic Education Program, Lebanon
Adult Education, Pendleton

**Pennsylvania**
- Adult Literacy Program of Wayne/Pike Counties, Honesdale
- Crawford County READ Program, Meadville
- The Midland Center, Inc., Adult Basic Education Services, Midland
- Bradford–Wyoming County Literacy Program, Troy

**South Carolina**
- Beaufort County Literacy Association, Beaufort
- Laurens County Literacy Council, Clinton
- Florence Area Literacy Council, Florence
- McCormick County Literacy Association, McCormick
- Dorchester County Adult Education, Summerville
- Hampton County Literacy Council, Varnville

**South Dakota**
- Southern Hills Literacy Council, Custer
- Huron Literacy Council, Huron
- Southern Dakota Literacy, Winner

**Tennessee**
- Hickman County Adult Education, Centerville
- Read to Lead, Jellico
- Lawrence County Job Training Center—JTPA, Lawrenceburg
- Henderson County JTPA Literacy, Lexington
- Wayne County Literacy Program, Waynesboro

**Texas**
- Washington County Literacy, Brenham
- Literacy Volunteers of America—Cleburne, Cleburne
- Maverick County Literacy Council, Eagle Pass
- Franklin County Library Literacy Project, Mt. Vernon
- San Marcos Public Library Adult Education Program, San Marcos

**Utah**
- North Sanpete Adult Education, Mt. Pleasant

**Vermont**
- Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, Barre

**Virginia**
- Pittsylvania County Public Library Mobile Literacy Center, Chatham
- Greensville/Emporia Adult Basic Education Literacy Program, Emporia
- Literacy Volunteers of Gloucester, Gloucester
- Ivanhoe Civic League, Ivanhoe
- Project LEEP, Onancock
- Campbell County Public Library Literacy Program, Rustburg
- Patrick County Public Schools, Stuart

**Washington**
- Whatcom Literacy Council, Bellingham
- Read to Succeed, Colville

**West Virginia**
- Literacy Volunteers of West Virginia, Parkersburg
- Literacy Volunteers of Mercer City, Princeton
- Senior Community Service Program, Vienna

**Wisconsin**
- Literacy Volunteers of America—Chippewa Valley, Eau Claire
- Instructional Support Services Division, Fennimore
- Indianhead District Literacy, Superior

**Wyoming**
- Literacy Volunteer of America—Northern Wyoming, Sheridan

# Appendix E

## Survey of 50 State Literacy Contacts

The following questions were used in phone interviews with 50 state key literacy contacts.

State:

Address:

Phone:

1. Give an overview of who state literacy providers are in your state? Who does the state fund directly? Who relies most heavily on local funds?

2. Is your state gaining or losing literacy programs in the last two years?

3. Does your state have any new rural literacy efforts?

4. How does your state define illiteracy?

# Appendix F

## Rural Illiteracy Rates by State (Ages 20+)

| State | % 4th rural | % 8th rural | % 12th rural | State | % 4th rural | % 8th rural | % 12th rural |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 7.07 | 28.866 | 50.0 | Montana | 1.183 | 14.044 | 26.3 |
| Arizona | 7.27 | 19.398 | 36.1 | Nebraska | 1.195 | 16.302 | 28.7 |
| Alaska | 5.71 | 14.224 | 24.8 | Nevada | 1.56 | 9.794 | 25.6 |
| Arkansas | 6.401 | 28.97 | 48.4 | New Hampshire | 0.723 | 10.931 | 23.5 |
| California | 4.447 | 14.927 | 29.0 | New Jersey | 1.862 | 13.598 | 27.1 |
| Colorado | 1.727 | 11.104 | 22.5 | New Mexico | 8.756 | 22.788 | 38.9 |
| Connecticut | 1.132 | 9.489 | 19.8 | New York | 1.434 | 14.013 | 29.8 |
| Delaware | 2.593 | 18.603 | 38.1 | North Carolina | 5.887 | 25.646 | 47.9 |
| Florida | 4.21 | 19.974 | 39.0 | North Dakota | 2.223 | 27.223 | 37.2 |
| Georgia | 7.173 | 27.697 | 50.9 | Ohio | 1.508 | 15.017 | 32.4 |
| Hawaii | 6.948 | 19.837 | 30.5 | Oklahoma | 3.809 | 22.26 | 40.1 |
| Idaho | 1.607 | 12.767 | 27.9 | Oregon | 1.276 | 12.077 | 27.1 |
| Illinois | 1.514 | 18.351 | 32.3 | Pennsylvania | 1.489 | 18.824 | 34.4 |
| Indiana | 1.241 | 14.906 | 31.3 | Rhode Island | 0.969 | 12.466 | 27.2 |
| Iowa | 1.006 | 17.893 | 28.7 | South Carolina | 7.771 | 27.705 | 49.8 |
| Kansas | 1.195 | 12.127 | 28.1 | South Dakota | 1.688 | 24.281 | 34.7 |
| Kentucky | 7.54 | 36.555 | 52.6 | Tennessee | 7.074 | 33.229 | 50.5 |
| Louisiana | 8.855 | 27.877 | 47.1 | Texas | 6.577 | 23.279 | 43.9 |
| Maine | 1.47 | 14.273 | 29.6 | Utah | 1.768 | 7.806 | 23.4 |
| Maryland | 2.74 | 18.263 | 36.5 | Vermont | 1.161 | 15.533 | 27.7 |
| Massachusetts | 1.091 | 8.944 | 20.0 | Virginia | 6.894 | 30.494 | 49.6 |
| Michigan | 1.466 | 14.306 | 30.4 | Washington | 1.452 | 11.017 | 25.0 |
| Minnesota | 1.26 | 22.47 | 33.2 | West Virginia | 4.812 | 29.35 | 46.6 |
| Mississippi | 7.753 | 29.144 | 49.6 | Wisconsin | 1.469 | 19.462 | 31.6 |
| Missouri | 2.667 | 24.939 | 40.5 | Wyoming | 1.049 | 9.585 | 23.7 |

# Appendix G

## Illiteracy Rates: Persons Aged 20+

| State | % 4th Rural | % 8th Rural | %12th Rural | 4th Ur–Ru Diff | 8th Ur–Ru Diff | 12th Ur–Ru Diff |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 7.070% | 28.866% | 50.0% | 2.42% | 10.84% | 15.51% |
| Arizona | 7.270% | 19.398% | 36.1% | 4.60% | 6.93% | 11.54% |
| Alaska | 5.710% | 14.224% | 24.8% | 4.60% | 9.69% | 11.98% |
| Arkansas | 6.401% | 28.970% | 48.4% | 1.90% | 9.29% | 12.77% |
| California | 4.447% | 14.927% | 29.0% | 0.81% | 1.94% | 3.83% |
| Colorado | 1.727% | 11.104% | 22.5% | 0.10% | 2.26% | 2.78% |
| Connecticut | 1.132% | 9.489% | 19.8% | –1.47% | –6.47% | –9.93% |
| Delaware | 2.593% | 18.603% | 38.1% | 0.93% | 7.79% | 12.82% |
| Florida | 4.210% | 19.974% | 39.0% | 1.23% | 4.62% | 8.46% |
| Georgia | 7.173% | 27.697% | 50.9% | 2.50% | 10.46% | 15.94% |
| Hawaii | 6.948% | 19.837% | 30.5% | 2.78% | 6.89% | 7.75% |
| Idaho | 1.607% | 12.767% | 27.9% | 0.24 % | 2.64% | 5.36% |
| Illinois | 1.514% | 18.351% | 32.3% | –1.19% | 2.18% | 1.17% |
| Indiana | 1.241% | 14.906% | 31.3% | –0.63% | 0.37% | –0.13% |
| Iowa | 1.006% | 17.893% | 28.7% | –0.04% | 5.42% | 4.47% |
| Kansas | 1.195% | 12.127% | 28.1% | –0.02% | 5.06% | 4.85% |
| Kentucky | 7.540% | 36.555% | 52.6% | 4.34% | 16.64% | 16.77% |
| Louisiana | 8.855% | 27.877% | 47.1% | 3.11 % | 8.34% | 11.32% |
| Maine | 1.470% | 14.273% | 29.6% | –0.38% | –1.13% | 1.01% |
| Maryland | 2.740% | 18.263% | 36.5% | 0.66% | 4.40% | 7.46% |
| Massachusetts | 1.091% | 8.944% | 20.0% | –1.66% | –4.54% | –6.69% |
| Michigan | 1.466% | 14.306% | 30.4% | –0.67% | 1.52% | 0.99% |
| Minnesota | 1.260% | 22.470% | 33.2% | 0.19 % | 11.70% | 12.93% |
| Mississippi | 7.753% | 29.144% | 49.6% | 2.57% | 10.26% | 14.78% |
| Missouri | 2.667% | 24.939% | 40.5% | 0.67% | 8.22% | 9.50% |
| Montana | 1.183% | 14.044% | 26.3% | –0.06% | 2.66% | 4.75% |
| Nebraska | 1.195% | 16.302% | 28.7% | 0.07% | 5.82% | 7.06% |
| Nevada | 1.560% | 9.794% | 25.6% | 0.19% | 1.44% | 2.30% |
| New Hampshire | 0.723% | 10.931% | 23.5% | –0.69% | –4.03% | –4.62% |
| New Jersey | 1.862% | 13.598% | 27.1% | –0.94% | –2.68% | –3.78% |
| New Mexico | 8.756% | 22.788% | 38.9% | 5.21% | 9.69% | 12.88% |
| New York | 1.434% | 14.013% | 29.8% | –2.11% | –2.90% | –2.10% |
| North Carolina | 5.887% | 25.646% | 47.9% | 1.56% | 8.22% | 12.65% |
| North Dakota | 2.223% | 27.223% | 37.2% | 0.45% | 12.39% | 15.26% |
| Ohio | 1.508% | 15.017% | 32.4% | –0.36% | 1.91% | 2.29% |
| Oklahoma | 3.809% | 22.260% | 40.1% | 1.48% | 8.84% | 12.13% |
| Oregon | 1.276% | 12.077% | 27.1% | –0.07% | 2.55% | 5.53% |
| Pennsylvania | 1.489% | 18.824% | 34.4% | –0.60% | 3.52% | 2.69% |
| Rhode Island | 0.969% | 12.466% | 27.2% | –2.84% | –6.95% | –10.07% |
| South Carolina | 7.771% | 27.705% | 49.8% | 2.96% | 9.27% | 13.08% |

## Illiteracy Rates: Persons Aged 20+ (cont.)

| State | % 4th Rural | % 8th Rural | %12th Rural | 4th Ur-Ru Diff | 8th Ur-Ru Diff | 12th Ur-Ru Diff |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| South Dakota | 1.688% | 24.281% | 34.7% | 0.62% | 10.58% | 11.99% |
| Tennessee | 7.074% | 33.229% | 50.5% | 2.87 % | 13.83% | 15.56% |
| Texas | 6.577% | 23.279% | 43.9% | 1.03% | 5.92% | 10.98% |
| Utah | 1.768% | 7.806% | 23.4% | 0.72 % | 2.05% | 5.49% |
| Vermont | 1.161% | 15.533% | 27.7% | 0.02% | 2.41% | 3.39% |
| Virginia | 6.894% | 30.494% | 49.6% | 4.09% | 16.91% | 21.86% |
| Washington | 1.452% | 11.017% | 25.0% | 0.16% | 2.43% | 4.96% |
| West Virginia | 4.812% | 29.350% | 46.6% | 2.04% | 11.09% | 14.55% |
| Wisconsin | 1.469% | 19.462% | 31.6% | -0.12% | 5.85% | 5.79% |
| Wyoming | 1.049% | 9.585% | 23.7% | -0.08% | 1.42% | 4.50% |

# Appendix H

## Rural Illiteracy Rates (Ages 20–24)

| State | % 4th Rural | % 8th Rural | %12th Rural | State | % 4th Rural | % 8th Rural | %12th Rural |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 0.813% | 8.043% | 29.2% | Montana | 0.641% | 3.575% | 16.4% |
| Arizona | 0.293% | 1.673% | 29.8% | Nebraska | 0.780% | 1.781% | 9.5% |
| Alaska | 0.528% | 4.338% | 19.7% | Nevada | 0.846% | 3.642% | 19.1% |
| Arkansas | 0.731% | 7.005% | 27.8% | New Hampshire | 0.375% | 2.353% | 14.8% |
| California | 2.903% | 7.816% | 24.4% | New Jersey | 0.850% | 2.708% | 13.9% |
| Colorado | 0.437% | 2.199% | 15.4% | New Mexico | 1.393% | 6.727% | 27.3% |
| Connecticut | 0.653% | 2.366% | 11.9% | New York | 0.764% | 3.352% | 15.5% |
| Delaware | 1.086% | 5.075% | 23.1% | North Carolina | 0.687% | 5.913% | 26.8% |
| Florida | 1.381% | 6.933% | 28.6% | North Dakota | 0.540% | 2.280% | 11.8% |
| Georgia | 0.713% | 8.100% | 32.0% | Ohio | 0.676% | 3.585% | 17.9% |
| Hawaii | 0.344% | 2.866% | 13.5% | Oklahoma | 0.985% | 4.249% | 21.9% |
| Idaho | 1.556% | 5.559% | 21.3% | Oregon | 0.851% | 3.503% | 20.2% |
| Illinois | 0.428% | 2.343% | 14.9% | Pennsylvania | 0.640% | 3.478% | 15.5% |
| Indiana | 0.464% | 4.198% | 19.2% | Rhode Island | 0.000% | 2.142% | 13.6% |
| Iowa | 0.478% | 2.025% | 11.2% | South Carolina | 0.952% | 7.008% | 26.2% |
| Kansas | 0.560% | 2.398% | 13.5% | South Dakota | 0.695% | 4.758% | 14.5% |
| Kentucky | 0.985% | 11.156% | 33.2% | Tennessee | 0.941% | 10.191% | 31.3% |
| Louisiana | 1.324% | 9.122% | 28.1% | Texas | 1.629% | 8.362% | 27.9% |
| Maine | 0.747% | 3.389% | 16.8% | Utah | 0.674% | 2.047% | 16.4% |
| Maryland | 0.645% | 4.231% | 19.5% | Vermont | 0.668% | 2.996% | 13.3% |
| Massachusetts | 0.561% | 1.856% | 10.1% | Virginia | 0.806% | 8.592% | 29.1% |
| Michigan | 0.504% | 2.361% | 17.0% | Washington | 1.007% | 3.883% | 19.7% |
| Minnesota | 0.549% | 1.395% | 10.8% | West Virginia | 0.744% | 7.580% | 26.3% |
| Mississippi | 1.023% | 9.865% | 31.1% | Wisconsin | 0.537% | 1.775% | 13.2% |
| Missouri | 0.525% | 4.305% | 20.5% | Wyoming | 0.369% | 2.618% | 18.2% |

# Appendix I

## Illiteracy Rates: Persons Aged 20–24

| State | % 4th Rural | % 8th Rural | %12th Rural | 4th Ur–Ru Diff | 8th Ur–Ru Diff | 12th Ur–Ru Diff |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 0.813% | 8.043% | 29.2% | 0.14% | 3.84% | 10.94% |
| Arizona | 0.293% | 1.673% | 29.8% | –0.69% | –3.51% | 13.34% |
| Alaska | 0.528% | 4.338% | 19.7% | –0.23% | 2.52% | 7.86% |
| Arkansas | 0.731% | 7.005% | 27.8% | –0.01% | 2.65% | 9.36% |
| California | 2.903% | 7.816% | 24.4% | 0.85% | 1.12 % | 5.22% |
| Colorado | 0.437% | 2.199% | 15.4% | –0.30% | 0.02% | 1.24% |
| Connecticut | 0.653% | 2.366% | 11.9% | 0.09% | –0.63% | –2.15% |
| Delaware | 1.086% | 5.075% | 23.1% | 0.65% | 3.04% | 10.44% |
| Florida | 1.381% | 6.933% | 28.6% | 0.66% | 3.52% | 10.20% |
| Georgia | 0.713% | 8.100% | 32.0% | 0.07% | 3.88% | 11.60% |
| Hawaii | 0.344% | 2.866% | 13.5% | –0.30% | 1.09% | 2.69% |
| Idaho | 1.556% | 5.559% | 21.3% | 0.97 % | 3.17% | 6.92% |
| Illinois | 0.428% | 2.343% | 14.9% | –0.61% | –2.19% | –3.65% |
| Indiana | 0.464% | 4.198% | 19.2% | 0.11% | 1.30% | 2.16% |
| Iowa | 0.478% | 2.025% | 11.2% | 0.03% | 0.07 % | 0.13% |
| Kansas | 0.560% | 2.398% | 13.5% | 0.12% | 0.35% | –0.57% |
| Kentucky | 0.985% | 11.156% | 33.2% | 0.49% | 7.26% | 13.80% |
| Louisiana | 1.324% | 9.122% | 28.1% | 0.55% | 3.46 % | 8 .01% |
| Maine | 0.747% | 3.389% | 16.8% | 0.27 % | 0.66% | 4.24% |
| Maryland | 0.645% | 4.231% | 19.5% | 0.22% | 0.98 % | 2.95% |
| Massachusetts | 0.561% | 1.856% | 10.1% | –0.25% | –1.30% | –1.91% |
| Michigan | 0.504% | 2.361% | 17.0% | 0.01% | 0.08% | 0.97% |
| Minnesota | 0.549% | 1.395% | 10.8% | 0.10% | 0.39% | 2.29% |
| Mississippi | 1.023% | 9.865% | 31.1% | 0.14% | 4.10% | 10.26% |
| Missouri | 0.525% | 4.305% | 20.5% | 0.01% | 1.45% | 4.57% |
| Montana | 0.641% | 3.575% | 16.4% | 0.30% | 1.88% | 6.82% |
| Nebraska | 0.780% | 1.781% | 9.5% | 0.26 % | 0.22% | –0.75% |
| Nevada | 0.846% | 3.642% | 19.1% | 0.25% | 1.37% | 1.36% |
| New Hampshire | 0.375% | 2.353% | 14.8% | –0.03% | –0.54% | 1.15% |
| New Jersey | 0.850% | 2.708% | 13.9% | 0.11% | –0.72% | –0.66% |
| New Mexico | 1.393% | 6.727% | 27.3% | 0.57% | 3.26 % | 9 .68% |
| New York | 0.764% | 3.352% | 15.5% | –0.12% | –0.44% | –0.99% |
| North Carolina | 0.687% | 5.913% | 26.8% | 0.19% | 2.47% | 9.39% |
| North Dakota | 0.540% | 2.280% | 11.8% | –0.08% | 0.97% | 4.60% |
| Ohio | 0.676% | 3.585% | 17.9% | 0.26% | 1.38% | 2.26% |
| Oklahoma | 0.985% | 4.249% | 21.9% | 0.44% | 1.62% | 4.90% |
| Oregon | 0.851% | 3.503% | 20.2% | 0.08% | 0.96% | 4.79% |
| Pennsylvania | 0.640% | 3.478% | 15.5% | 0.25% | 1.60 % | 2 .74% |
| Rhode Island | 0.000% | 2.142% | 13.6% | –0.96% | –2.83% | –3.97% |

## Illiteracy Rates: Persons Aged 20–24 (cont.)

| State | % 4th Rural | % 8th Rural | %12th Rural | 4th Ur–Ru Diff | 8th Ur–Ru Diff | 12th Ur–Ru Diff |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| South Carolina | 0.952% | 7.008% | 26.2% | 0.35% | 2.60% | 7.28% |
| South Dakota | 0.695% | 4.758% | 14.5% | 0.24% | 2.89% | 5.66% |
| Tennessee | 0.941% | 10.191% | 31.3% | 0.38% | 5.82 % | 12.90% |
| Texas | 1.629% | 8.362% | 27.9% | 0.30% | 1.75% | 6.34% |
| Utah | 0.674% | 2.047% | 16.4% | –0.02% | 0.47% | 3.62% |
| Vermont | 0.668% | 2.996% | 13.3% | 0.43% | 1.42% | 4.25% |
| Virginia | 0.806% | 8.592% | 29.1% | 0.29% | 5.11% | 13.07% |
| Washington | 1.007% | 3.883% | 19.7% | 0.37% | 2.02% | 6.14% |
| West Virginia | 0.744% | 7.580% | 26.3% | 0.30% | 4.31% | 12.61% |
| Wisconsin | 0.537% | 1.775% | 13.2% | 0.03% | 0.37% | 1.23% |
| Wyoming | 0.369% | 2.618% | 18.2% | 0.06% | 0.73% | 5.32% |

# Appendix J

## The Young Adult Literacy Assessment Conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress

**NAEP Reading Scale**

| Level | Urban % at Level | Rural % at Level | RU–UR Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| 100 | 99.136 | 99.966 | 0.830 |
| 150 | 98.222 | 99.768 | 1.546 |
| 200 | 94.302 | 96.458 | 2.138 |
| 220 | 89.634 | 92.120 | 2.486 |
| 240 | 82.428 | 83.588 | 1.160 |
| 260 | 72.404 | 73.948 | 1.544 |
| 280 | 59.682 | 58.252 | –1.430 |
| 300 | 44.450 | 42.116 | –2.334 |
| 320 | 28.744 | 27.818 | –0.926 |
| 340 | 16.510 | 14.554 | –1.956 |
| 360 | 8.072 | 5.622 | –2.450 |
| 380 | 3.288 | 2.072 | –1.216 |
| 400 | 0.980 | 0.644 | –0.336 |
| 450 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

**Document Literacy Scale**

| Level | Urban % at Level | Rural % at Level | RU–UR Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| 100 | 99.488 | 99.788 | 0.300 |
| 150 | 97.974 | 99.250 | 1.276 |
| 200 | 93.778 | 95.034 | 1.256 |
| 220 | 90.114 | 90.860 | 0.746 |
| 240 | 83.906 | 83.074 | –0.832 |
| 260 | 73.704 | 73.290 | –0.414 |
| 280 | 60.332 | 58.158 | –2.174 |
| 300 | 44.162 | 42.374 | –1.788 |
| 320 | 29.912 | 25.944 | –3.968 |
| 340 | 16.898 | 13.770 | –3.128 |
| 360 | 7.744 | 5.150 | –2.594 |
| 380 | 2.586 | 1.524 | –1.062 |
| 400 | 0.708 | 0.290 | –0.418 |
| 450 | 0.022 | 0.000 | –0.022 |

**Prose Literacy Scale**

| Level | Urban % at Level | Rural % at Level | RU–UR Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| 100 | 99.942 | 100.000 | 0.058 |
| 150 | 99.166 | 99.654 | 0.488 |
| 200 | 94.670 | 96.064 | 1.394 |
| 220 | 90.394 | 92.022 | 1.628 |
| 240 | 83.648 | 84.540 | 0.892 |
| 260 | 73.328 | 73.746 | 0.418 |
| 280 | 59.386 | 59.128 | –0.258 |
| 300 | 44.386 | 42.278 | –2.108 |
| 320 | 29.068 | 26.238 | –2.830 |
| 340 | 16.316 | 13.840 | –2.476 |
| 360 | 7.654 | 7.166 | –0.488 |
| 380 | 2.694 | 2.484 | –0.210 |
| 400 | 0.840 | 0.828 | –0.012 |
| 450 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

**Quantitative Literacy Scale**

| Level | Urban % at Level | Rural % at Level | RU–UR Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| 100 | 99.808 | 99.968 | 0.160 |
| 150 | 98.816 | 99.510 | 0.694 |
| 200 | 94.422 | 95.584 | 1.162 |
| 220 | 90.168 | 91.342 | 1.174 |
| 240 | 83.486 | 84.538 | 1.052 |
| 260 | 73.418 | 73.166 | –0.252 |
| 280 | 60.602 | 59.126 | –1.476 |
| 300 | 44.362 | 42.368 | –1.994 |
| 320 | 28.618 | 27.434 | –1.184 |
| 340 | 15.896 | 14.480 | –1.416 |
| 360 | 7.586 | 6.694 | –0.892 |
| 380 | 2.770 | 2.410 | –0.360 |
| 400 | 0.848 | 0.812 | –0.036 |
| 450 | 0.000 | 0.044 | 0.044 |

# Appendix K

## Rural Literacy Providers

In our study, we wanted to identify which agencies were currently involved in delivering literacy services. We found this categorization process difficult. Some categories were clear and easy to identify, such as a school district, community college, and library. Others relied on resources from multiple agencies or organizations. The most frequently identified providers are detailed in Chapter 2. The following are definitions for each provider listed in the order mentioned in the above chapter.

1. **School District:** a local administrative unit that operates schools or contracts for school services in specific geographic areas.

2. **Library:** an institution which houses collections of systematically acquired and organized information resources which also provides assistance to users.

3. **Coalition/Council:** a local or statewide alliance of parties formed to work together.

4. **Community Based Organization (CBO):** an organization controlled by the community and focused on the development of both the individual participants and their community.

5. **Community College:** a public, postsecondary institution organized into two-year programs and offering instruction adapted in content, level, and schedule to the needs of the local community. Community colleges offer a comprehensive curriculum with transfer, occupational, general education, and adult education components.

6. **Vocational–Technical Schools:** an educational institution designed to provide vocational and technical instruction above the secondary education level for persons not seeking postsecondary degrees.

7. **Volunteer Organization:** an organization that is primarily operated by a volunteer staff.

8. **Job Training:** formal preparation for semi-skilled, skilled, technical, or paraprofessional occupations that fall below the baccalaureate degree.

9. **Community Education:** the extension of existing educational resources and programs (primarily those offered by public schools and community colleges) into the community for all age groups that are underserved.

10. **Other:** specifically named entities.

11. **State College/University:** an institution of higher learning, having facilities for teaching and research and comprised of undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools.

12. **Religious Organization:** an organization that has the teaching and promotion of a specific belief in a supernatural power as its primary purpose.

13. **Appalachia Regional Commission:** the commission traditionally has been active in stimulating innovations in vocational education and more recently has focused regional attention on dropout prevention. The ARC is also concerned about the impact of statewide education reforms on small rural schools. It serves a thirteen-state region.

14. **Community Development:** a process by which communities and outside agencies plan, organize, or implement general improvements of community resources, facilities, economic conditions, etc.

15. **Business/Industry/Workplace:** a commercial enterprise that produces and manufactures goods and provides employment.

16. **Aging Agency:** a service agency officially acting for senior citizens.

17. **Health Agency:** a service agency providing for people's physical well-being.

18. **Prison:** an institution for confining people convicted of crime.

19. **Parks/Recreations:** a service agency in the community that provides leisure and athletic programming.

# Appendix L

## Human Service Providers, Agencies, Positions, and Programs That Network with Literacy Programs

Rural literacy providers rarely missed an opportunity to network with other human service providers whether it be for student referrals, materials, resource sharing or other cooperative ventures. This list is a compilation of agencies, positions, and programs mentioned by the 700+ survey and 150 rural literacy program director surveyed. It serves to illustrate the broad range of networking undertaken by rural programs and is in no way meant to be inclusive.

**Education groups mentioned were:**
Public school affiliations: schools, school boards, GED programs, learning disability teachers, driver education students, bookfairs, retired teachers, parent/child reading programs, Even Start, Head Start, and State Departments of Education, and BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services).

**Postsecondary education affiliations:** community college remedial courses, state colleges, and college disabled/handicapped programs.

**Library affiliations:** state library coalitions and local libraries.

**Literacy affiliations:** literacy councils, regional literacy coalitions, state literacy commissions, Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA), and Project PLUS.

**City/Community level:** community education councils, city reading commissions, Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, adult education programs, English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes, and museums.

**Housing organizations included:**
domestic violence and womens' shelters, homeless coalitions, rescue missions, group homes, an armory, the Red Cross, YMCAs, and housing authorities.

**Food organization included:**
Cooperative Extension food and nutrition programs, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), food stamp offices, restaurants, food pantries, nutrition programs, Salvation Army, and home economic clubs.

**Employment and training organizations included:**
occupational development centers, technical institutes, job training assistance programs, human development offices, career resource programs, vocational–technical schools, dislocated worker programs, employment services and offices, employment security divisions, industries, chambers of commerce, disabled adult programs, sheltered workshops, associations of farmworkers, agricultural extension services, regional occupational programs, Department of Human Resources, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Private Industry Council (PIC), Job Corps, Indian Employment Services, Manpower, Joint Council for Economic Opportunity, Economic Opportunities Agency, and Project Independence (Dept. of Labor and Employment Security joint project).

**Correctional agencies or individuals included:**
child protection services, juvenile detention centers, youthful offender system, probation officers, pre-release program of law enforcement programs, law enforcement agencies, correctional facilities, courts, judges, sheriffs, jailers, state troopers, district attorneys, rape and domestic violence shelters, and legal aid foundations.

**Public financial support agencies and organizations included:**
Junior Womens' and Rotary Clubs, community action groups, Catholic Social Ministries, Lutheran Social Services, Baptist associations, Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), community action groups, Department of Human Services, Department of Labor, Employment Security Division, Appalachian Research and Defense Fund, the United Way, Department of Public Aid, Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and Social Rehabilitation Services (SRS).

**Support organizations included:**
Latinos Clubs, migrant departments, Refugee Rights, La Casa Inc. (an amnesty organization), Indian tribes, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), tribal social services, Indian Alliance Centers, farmers' unions, churches, pastors, parenting classes, teen parents centers, females' resource centers, displaced homemaker groups, Alcoholics Anonymous, senior adult centers, and governor offices.

**Physical health groups or individuals included:**
County Dept. of Health, alcohol and drug rehabilitation treatment centers, migrant health services, YMCA aerobic classes, adult and youth health centers, doctors and nurses, well-child clinics, prenatal clinics, local hospitals, and Easter Seals.

**Mental health groups included:**
Foster parents, youth-at-risk programs, Dept. of Youth and Children Services (DFACS), females' resource centers, adult retarded citizens groups, mental retardation councils, mental health clinics, drug rehabilitation programs and local detoxification units, counseling centers, emotional disturbance recovery program, a home for recovering schizophrenics, and a County Task Force for Self-Esteem.

**Public information sources included:**
Childcare councils, councils on aging, high blood pressure clinics, Veteran's Administration, community aid network, national hotline, and fire departments.